

crowd who turned out. 'Bad Joke' made the impact needed to gain the respect of the uninitiated. Later the individual songs began to fade into each other. But the stage presence made up for it, and by the time 'Plastic Jewel', 'Dreadlock Stone' and 'Blind Rail Eye' were delivered, there was almost no one left unconverted.

Breathe are a more conventional entity, relying on substance over style. They used their two guitars to maximum effect when going for the full on assault, but seemed unable to achieve any delicacy when they were looking for it. The keyboards were almost always lost in the mix, except when everything else died away, leaving room for them to hum away happily.

The good doctor, he hated Breathe, but I enjoyed the noise — and noise it was. For a band who pride themselves on subtlety of writing and musicianship, there was a lot of ball breaking hard guitar noise (with a big shout for 'Dive Tower') going on. At times it lost its way, but through most of the gig Breathe were pure, ear splitting joy.

The doctor didn't like it, but what do doctors know anyway?

DONALD REID

THE MUSHROOM BALL 95

The Nitespot, New Plymouth, May 12 and 13.

The *Mushroom Ball* has become an institution amongst inveterate gig goers around the North Island, and with the inclusion this year of two Christchurch bands (**Ape Management** and **Snort**), and **Dead Centre** from Nelson, its fame is obviously spreading South.

The *Ball* (the eighth in nine years) is more than just a gig. In fact, the two nights of entertainment sometimes become almost incidental to the weekend's events.

Day One

The first thing you notice on entering the venue is the hard work Poodle has put in redesigning the stage with scaffolding and camouflage nets — a vast improvement on what it originally was.

Auckland's **Think Tank** open this year's proceedings with a hard rock set that goes largely ignored, as the steadily building crowd heads first to the bar (Taranaki Ale on tap), then turns to catch up with friends and fellow punters from around the country. Having seen them before, and not having eaten since breakfast, I decide to head around the corner to Chino's for some of their fine vegetarian cuisine (no hunks of decomposing flesh for me, thank you very much). This pursuit of culinary gratification, however, means I miss **Schizophrenia** and the debut of my man Hooper on bass. Sorry guys.

I arrive back as **Hideously Disfigured** are getting their set underway. What can you say about a band that calls their debut tape release *Greatest Hits Volume II* and has song titles like 'She Goes Off'? Needless to say there's a lot of humour in this particular brand of Taranaki hardcore and, as always, they are a treat to catch live. Hideous in da house, yeah!

The end of **Hideously Disfigured's** set brings a bit of panic in the Warners camp. Spencer, their bass player, has had an asthma attack and been taken to find a hospital. "It's the weather," he tells me, upon his return. I tend to think it may have had something to do with years of marijuana inhalation, but hold my tongue, as it's not my scene to kick a man while he's down.

Meanwhile, **Nefarious** have taken the stage, determined to shake the spectre of several mediocre gigs and some bad publicity over the last couple of

weeks. They fairly much succeed. **Nefarious** play hardcore, fullstop. No 'Full Moon Over Mushroom Town' (an old Toxic Avengers song), which is a shame as, for obvious reasons, it always goes down well at this time of year.

I spy Alan from the Warners, who is shaking his head in mock amazement. Apparently he'd been out the back, just prior to **Nefarious** going on stage, in the hope of witnessing an orgy of self abuse, only to be confronted by a sober Nigel Toxic acutely tuning his guitar! A stranger sight he didn't expect to see. Well, it paid off, as **Nefarious** went some of the way to redeeming themselves with a solid performance.

The Warners, featuring a sicker than normal looking Spencer, finally hit the stage. They launch straight into the instrumental title track off their forthcoming album, the wonderfully entitled *Bogan's Heroes*. From there, they virtually run through the whole album, only throwing in 'Homosaurus Rap' off their last release, *Sitting Pretty*. Standouts were the soon-to-be-classic '351' and their bastardisation of the Osmonds classic 'Crazy Horses'. Their magnum opus tonight is a song called 'Transfusion X' — a song their guitarist Jon describes as "an epic". When asked why, he replies (hopefully tongue in cheek) that it "takes you on a trip, y'know, it's a rock journey". Ahh, yip. OK Jon, yeah.

Dead Centre are left to round off tonight's entertainment. They play punk rock, nothing more, quite a lot less. Maybe it was 1979 when they left Nelson and walked to New Plymouth, 'cause they sound tired. I'm tired too, so I'm outta there (like bell bottomed trousers).

Day Two

The centre of our social activities is the White Hart Hotel, which once again is fully booked up. We get a posse together and, after a superb breakfast across the road at the Art Gallery Cafe, we decide to head up the mountain. It's a supremely beautiful day, and it's only 45 minutes later when we arrive at the top carpark on the Egmont Village side. The sluggishness that is the aftermath of the night before is soon dissipated as the fresh mountain air rejuvenates our lungs. Nothing for it but to blow some doobage and fuck ourselves up again. Ahh — how sweet is life?

A fruitless search for mushrooms by some of our party on the way back, at Lake Mahoeu, allows the rest of us to simply veg and enjoy the day. Then it's back into town to prep for the ensuing night.

Our evening meal at Burundis goes on a little long, which means we miss opening act **Dog Tooth Violet**, from Palmerston North, although their irrepressible vocalist Rebecca assures me they did a good gig. If she's happy, I'm happy. Still, it was a bummer to miss them.

Next up it's **Ape Management**, who include ex-members of the Axelgrinders, the Scuzzbuckets and S*M*A*K. Having seen them play a less than average gig in Christchurch, I was ready to write them off. I was only too happy to have my view of them dumped on its head, as they delivered an incendiary performance that, while owing a debt to the Birthday Party (especially in the vocal department), set about forging an identity distinctly their own. They were a personal highlight of *The Ball*. Reta from **Snort** best summed them up as she licked her index finger, then pressed it against an imaginary hot plate — tsss — they were fuckin' smokin'!

Palmerston North three-piece **the Ashvins** (great name) are now on. The sound is good as they deliver a set of short, punchy rock songs. My memory of them is a little clouded though (I think somebody put something in my drink), so I'm gonna have to catch them again sometime.

All women outfit **Snort** are up next. Having warmed

up with two Auckland gigs over the previous nights, they're attacking their instruments with a vengeance. They howl, they squeal, they pound and smash their songs as if exorcising the ghosts of recurring demons. All this while maintaining a 'fuck you, muthafucka' attitude that the frenzied crowd down the front lap up. Their blues stomp classic, 'Cos I'm Evil', sees Joanne pulling off some subliminal licks on her guitar, while Reta gets down and dirty with hers. An inspired performance, and the highlight for many here tonight.

Next up, it's the only band to have played all eight *Mushroom Balls*, local heroes **Sticky Filth**. They've had a busy year. As well as playing all the major Summer festivals (*Mountain Rock*, *The Big Day Out*, *Strawberry Fields* and the *Nile River*, as part of their South Island Tour), they've supported Suicidal Tendencies and finally seen the release of their (truly) long awaited three track vinyl EP, *Def Thru Misadventure*. But it's a curiously subdued Sticky Filth on stage tonight, as if the weight of expectation is, not so much heavy, but not quite allowing them the freedom to simply play and play well. Not that they're bad of course. Sticky Filth still shit over 95 percent of what's around in their sleep. Craig pounds his throat with his pick hand to produce a unique vibrato effect while screaming: 'There's a witch among us [Nadia]'. Chris debuts his fire breathing techniques, leaving Paul to pummel his rack-mounted kit with controlled abandon. It's a special treat to catch Sticky Filth on their home turf, and they don't disappoint.

It's left to Wainuiomata's death metal heroes, **Afterbirth**, to close this year's *Ball*. The crowd might be thinning, but they don't care. They came to party and play. Go hard or go home, as the saying goes. They go hard.

Well, that's it. Another hassle free *Mushroom Ball* comes to a close. Much props to Brian Wafer for his continued dedication to the cause, and the bands and punters that travelled from around the country to attend. I've got my souvenir T-shirt, so I'm happy. See y'all next year, second weekend in May: Be there.

GREG HAMMERDOWN

OPERATION MUSIC STORM GRAND FINAL Sammys, May 19.

May 19 was the big one: video suites and cameras abound; stressed officials running hither and thither; the big stage all lit up; pissed comperes; door charged upped by \$4 — the works. The big one all right — out of 70 odd bands only 10 survived the musical battle royale. Christchurch was represented by Trawler, Atomic Blossom, Disgraceland, Snort and Human — while the Cheese Band, Suka, Bodybomb, Humania and Axiom carried the flag for Dunedin.

Up first were **Humania**, looking great and sounding pristine. This lot has a strong sense of theatrics — elements of 70's space rock brought into a harsh 90's reality. Their songs are sometimes gorgeous, sometimes bizarre, and always packed full of action. **Humania** did not put a single foot wrong.

Unlike **Trawler**. Their lively roughed up pop brought comparisons of the 3Ds and Pavement springing to mind. Unfortunately, when the guitarist broke a string he took far too long to change it, losing plenty of **Brownie** points there! So the bassist and drummer soldiered on for a couple of songs — in my mind these were the most interesting, a bit more free and wide.

The Cheese Band always pull a big crowd. Their supporters crashed to the dancefloor faster than lions to the kill. They're another lively bunch of fellows, especially vocalist Cam. Their hardcore blend of funk was smooth and sexy, coloured well by the

trumpet of Paul Redican. For someone that doesn't dance, their's was genuine foot tappin' stuff.

Rather than relying on liveliness, **Disgraceland** let loose with complicated, strong, aggressive rhythms, locked together by bass, drums and guitar, producing a circling vultures effect. No one could escape the building tension. Interesting and very harsh.

Human bring a Butthole Surfers/Gary Glitter approach to death metal. Their lead vocalist was a cross between Iggy, Gibby and Gene Simmons. Their songs are mostly trashy death metal (kind of early Napalm Death in the vocal department — one growl, one scream), with an attempt at real glam at the end, which surprisingly worked. In these heady days of Failsafe it's refreshing to see there's still some damaged musical characters wondering the streets of Christchurch.

Suka forged their own style out of pure guts. Their songs were kind of bittersweet and discordant. Matthew Thornicroft's superb voice let loose a torrent of emotion that was simply breathtaking. The last song was a huge epic of passion — absolutely brilliant.

Snort are a raw, garagey sounding all women's band, who also had plenty of support. They found plenty of uses for a 4/4 beat, and were reminiscent of L7, only more exciting — not too original though. The lead vocalist/guitarist put on a great performance, which the other three could have taken cues from.

Bodybomb are the only nasty sounding band — plenty of complicated changes and extremely harsh in all departments. They were aggressive, yet cerebral — a certain political edge was felt through the lyrics. As with Suka, the band's last song was another building epic. It started off mellow and grew into a monster. It was superb.

I didn't have high expectations of **Atomic Blossom**. However, I was pleasantly surprised. This band specialise in big, glorious pop songs, quite awesome in places, as was their vocalist, Prudence Stone. **Atomic Blossom** seem to be a kind of midpoint between Let's Planet and the Pixies — very OK by me.

Lastly, **Axiom**. Their tight, rhythm based style of metal drew the usual strong crowd response. Instead of relying on guitar wank and showing off, **Axiom** use strong rifforama and solid bass and drums to impressive effect, complete with insane frontman.

And then it was over. Almost. The judges decided that fifth place was to go to the Cheese Band, fourth to Bodybomb, third to Axiom, second to Atomic Blossom, with Snort taking first place. There was always going to be controversy with the results, but you get that.

SHAUN JURY

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS, THE DORIS DAYS The Powerstation, May 21.

Tonight's theme is Fuego, as in fire. Tonight was almost dubbed Shit Night. Maybe They Might Be Giants were disillusioned by their low pre-sales — low enough for upstairs to be closed off. But it meant there was plenty of room for dancing, and you could never get a bunch of conga lines out of a seething mosh pit, could you? More on that later.

First up, a swell named band called the Doris Days took the stage. They played the only kind of pop better than the simply shiny kind of pop — that is the shiny and fast kind of pop. They delivered a tight set of mostly "songs about screwed up relationships", which proved as infectious as that nasty virus the two boys next to me thought was such an appealing topic of conversation — Ebola. Some people should really get out more. The Doris Days should play around more. Next stop, the main attraction.

"I've never seen so many nerds in my life," commented my partner, who was a bit iffy about attending in the first place. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was very friendly and the fans were certainly dedicated. I felt like I was at someone's house where the parents were out of town, and the clandestinely invited guests (all adults, I should point out) were anticipating the biggest night of their collective lives. They Might Be Giants did not disappoint them. In fact, they excelled any possible expectations by leaps, bounds, and a few well placed strikes on the glockenspiel. I'm talking talent to burn, and it was a mighty fire they stoked. Fuego indeed.

Starting with 'The Statue Got Me High', the now six-piece band blasted through a formidable set of hits and album favourites, in a typically expansive range of styles. The crowd went wild. They did the twist and the swim. They pogoed (to 'Dig My Grave' and 'Stomp Box'), laughed and screamed a lot. They knew all the words to all the songs (except, obviously, 'Why Does The Sun Shine?', which nobody except John Linnell could possibly know all the words to), and when put to the ultimate test, I'm buggered if they didn't conga. We congaed. A brassily extended 'No One Knows My Plan' was the perfect soundtrack to the mania.

While material from *John Henry* predominated (and highlighted the newer members of the fan base), the most rapturous response was reserved for old favourites 'Birdhouse in Your Soul', 'Racist Friend', 'Istanbul (Not Constantinople)' and 'Anna Ng' (which finally appeased the persistent roustabouts who'd been chanting for it since the minute the band walked on).

After two encores and their trademarked cover of the Edgar Winter Band's 'Frankenstein' (which featured a massive drum solo from the man with the mile wide smile, Brian Doherty), John Flansburgh made good on the guitar wrecking he'd been threatening his instrument with, and pulled the bastard's strings off. All of you who so obviously were not there missed out big time — even my nerd spotting partner endorses that sentiment. Hoorah! A convert.

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