

Road Apple rocks the Barn

Road Apples, the most well-know cover band of the Tragically Hip, performed at the Barn last Thursday to an extremely enthusiastic crowd. Their mix of an awesome stage presence and an amazingly accurate presentation of Hip tunes provided more entertainment than is usually afforded by a six dollar cover charge.

The night began with the mood-raising acoustic sound of Charlottetown's own, Gear's Optional. Chris, Scott, and Sean cover a huge repertoire of tunes ranging in style from the party-hearty Irish Rovers, to the socially conscious Indigo Girls. These guys are a great act themselves, and can be seen performing most weekends at a pub downtown.

By the end of their set, the Gear's guys had the crowd worked up to a frenzied pitch in anticipation of the main act. At about eleven o'clock, Road Apple took to the stage. The eager audience started thrashing and moshing from the first chord.

During their first set, the band drew more from the Hip's past. They played tunes from *Up to Here*, including "Trickle Down" and "Blow at High Dough". The audience ate the music up, dancing as though there were no tomorrow.

The second half was more modern, and even more pleasing than the first. Listeners were set afire by a racy rendition of "Highway Girl", then doused by the slow and sweet melody of "Weekdays". A huge crowd pleaser, "Courage" got everyone back on the floor again. These talented musicians were able to keep the place relatively crowded right until the very end.

During the second set, the group took some time to plug their own music. As Vagabond Groove, they played a couple of songs including an amazing mosh tune, "Oblivion". If all their songs are as good as those they played, Vagabond Groove will definitely be a name to watch for in the Canadian music scene.

The evening was an amazing success. The music was sensational, and the audience energized but not rowdy. The stars even shone down upon people as they waited to buy tickets at the door. Many congratulations go out to Finley Martin and all others who helped to organize the event.



Music reviews

RATINGS:

- 5--all that and a photomat
- 4-- ba-da-bing
- 3-- it could be worse
- 2-- this is the worst
- 1-- kittens thrown overboard at sea

Shawn Colvin
Cover Girl
(Columbia)

This album, comprised entirely of cover songs, has an amazing range. New York's Shawn Colvin performs everything from country, to pop, to rock, to the blues, and she does it masterfully. Mainly using an acoustic guitar and her haunting, lonesome, yet at times animated voice, Colvin manages superb rendition of Tom Waits' "(Looking for) the Heart of Saturday Night", Steve Earle's "Someday", Sting's "Everything (He) Does Is Magic", as well as the absolutely awe-inspiring "Killing the Blues", written by her unknown friend Roly Sally. This will definitely not disappoint. --Cindy Cameron

(4)



Velvet Crush
Teenage symphonies to God
(Sony)

Do not be fooled by the inventive title; this album sounds more like teenage elevator music. Velvet Crush combines colourless vocals, predictable lyrics, and sounds cloned from the Northern Pikes and the Grapes of Wrath to create music that can only be described as bland. Listen to this while you study organic polymers and I guarantee that it will not disturb your concentration. --Cindy Cameron

(2)



Gumball
"Revolution On Ice"
(Columbia)

"Well just take a look at that-- everything's either recycled, regurgitated, mass marketed, or ripped off!"

I couldn't have described this release any better myself. The ironic thing is, this quote is from the disc's inlay booklet.

Before listening to the CD I understood the above quotation to be a statement against the unoriginality of many current acts, not the recipe for Gumball's brand of generic, mediocre power pop. Silly me.

"Revolution On Ice" is not a total waste of plastic. Hidden in the mix are a few respectable riffs and phrases, but they are too few and far between to make the disk a worthwhile purchase.

Gumball's basically solid rhythm section lays down a respectable groove, held together by some quality drumming. The layered guitars are predictable, but still quite listenable, and the bass manages to skillfully back it all up.

The lead guitar tracks are, for the most part, reasonably well played, but they often are unsuited to the songs that they accompany. A few notable effects and tones are achieved throughout the entire disk, but guitarists Don Fleming and Malcolm Rivera resort to senseless, half-assed pyrotechnics to mask their overall lack of originality.

The keyboard playing is far less exciting. The solos are unskilled, uninteresting, and unnecessary. The rhythm parts succeed only in getting in the way of the groove set down by the rest of the band.

Gumball's Achilles heel is the vocalists. Lead singer Fleming's whining drone annoys, rather than entertains the listener. His singing is not only lacking in emotion, but is often out of tune as well. Worse than this, Fleming drags the entire band further down with his ability to make every song sound exactly the same.

The good news is that Fleming sings only nine of the disc's twelve tracks. The bad news is, Fleming is the best of the three vocalists.

Bassist Eric Vermillion takes over vocal duty for two songs. His gravelly howling drives those tracks to be the two most annoying of the bunch.

Drummer Jay Spiegel's vocal contribution is a sound that more closely resembles yelping than singing. This is very unfortunate, as of the three songsters, he is the only one with a sense of rhythm.

Musically, the songwriting is reasonably tolerable. There are a few flashes of originality in the band's arrangements, and two or three tracks show enough promise to warrant another listen.

The lyrics are another story entirely. One would think that Gumball included words for these songs as an afterthought and forgot to give the lyrics a point.

"Revolution On Ice" confronts all of the "deep" issues of our time, such as 'be happy, you're special', 'it used to be the Sixties-- but now it isn't'. How very profound!

Gumball's "Revolution On Ice" is a collection of ordinary songs, from an average band, all the more medial for the fact that the band members have nothing to say.

I rate this compact disc a two out of five for good reason, one point for each of its redeeming qualities. The first is for the inlay booklet's groovin' five panel "Uncle Crispy" cartoon. Crispy's summary of musical and social trends from the Sixties to present time is the most relevant and entertaining piece of this musical package.

The second point is awarded because the packaging supplies a great way to end this review with another quote from the cartoon: "I'm tellin' ya folks it's all over all done nothin' left nope farewell now please peel yourself away from my existence!" --Mike Beagan

(2)



Mother Tongue
(Sony)

What can you say about an album that you thought you would hate, but you ended up loving? The lead guitarist blew me away, he used effects that are rarely used, and pulled them off with incredible skill. Unfortunately the licks tend to be repetitive even if the solos are original. You can only listen to a line repeated so many times before it begins to grate on your nerves.

It was nice to hear the bass guitar taking a lead role in many of the pieces, it often made up for the repetitiveness in the guitar lines. The solos were well played and added a lot to what would have been otherwise drab tunes.

The vocalist used a lot of techniques that any decent vocal teacher would wipe out of a student as quickly as possible. He exaggerated these techniques to such a point that they become an integrated part of the piece. Examples can be found in the songs "Broken", where he uses a very coarse sound that almost makes his voice sound broken, and in "Mad World", where he uses throat vibrato to give the impression of being out of control without actually losing control of his sound. His enunciation is incredibly clear at all times, so that even when he's screeching out in that horrid tone that thrash singers use you can still tell exactly what he is saying.

Within one piece they have the tendency to change tempo so many times that one is left dizzy trying to follow them. In some cases this adds a nice effect, but at other times it becomes frustrating to have to follow. They also tend to end a lot of their ballads on thrashy notes. This would be interesting done once, but they tend to over do it.

On the whole I'd say the album is well worth a listen. The musicianship is as impressive as it is unusual to find in a band of their style. --Cathy Hamus

(4)