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Screamfeeder, Midget, The Butcher Birds @ The Troubadour, Brisbane (09/05/09)

Gig Reviews by QueenNahs, 12th May, 2009



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There's something to be said for doing things right the first time around. When you get it right, you've a greater chance of being able to repeat it perfectly, relieving the feeling that the initial success brought to your life. And with this in mind, we climbed the stairs of The Troubadour knowing that this evening would be one of those special events, when a band that got it so, so right the first time are bringing it back and playing it live. Tonight, **Screamfeeder** play their 1996 album *Kitten Licks* from start to finish and it seems the capacity crowd couldn't be more excited – unless they were the beaming frontman behind the merch desk.

Greeted warmly by a grinning, buoyant **Tim Steward** as first drinks were ordered, a deluxe copy of *Kitten Licks* (a very cool digi pack with seven bonus tracks and poignant liner notes) was purchased and autographed just before **The Butcher Birds**' befitting opening set of fuzzed-out dropped-D minx grunge goodness came to a close. The still-growing crowd was speckled with local music industry notaries and scenesters; cementing notions that the Brisbane music community verges on the familial; a travelling circus of characters who greet each other as brethren at show after show, gathered tonight in support of their own.

After a brief hiatus filled with music of the day and a couple of hundred people shouting at each other over it, mid-90's indie stable mates **Midget** take the stage. Noting it had been over a decade since they last played Brisbane, once they get underway a feeling that those who weren't here then had missed out on something great starts to rise. **Chris Moller** wields his guitar with confidence, his Cobain-esk voice a counterpoint to the dark, rasping might of **Keith Hamlyn**'s shuddering bass and brute-force gravely vocals. However, it's not until **Ian Botham** launches into the drum beat of *Dogbite* that the memories of *Livid*'s past come flooding back – the recognition of the track not confined to yours truly. Judging from the call outs and banter between band and crowd, there are a number of raucous 30-something lads in the audience who know the songs and are more than pleased that this band is back in town.

"What the fuck! Holy shit, man! How are you?" As the headliners gaff leads to the floor and check the sound, more people move toward the stage and old gig buddies that haven't been seen for years start to materialise in front of each other. There is a lot of man hugging going on. It's a heart-warming thing. This is what Tim was talking about when he spoke to FL about this tour: people remember what they were doing and how much this album means to them as part of the soundtrack to their lives. For those few who found old mates in the crowd, the whole idea behind this event just kicked it over the top of 'great' and into 'epic' territory.

From the opening bars of *Static* it's clear that **Screamfeeder**: **Tim Steward** (guitar, vocals), **Kellie Lloyd** (bass, keys, vocals) and **Dean Shwreb** (drums), are primed to deliver a tight, energetic performance reminiscent of those when *Kitten Licks* was first released. *Bridge Over Nothing* is bang on, literally. Shwreb has long been hailed as one of Australia's best drummers, and the sheer physicality of his precise, dexterous onslaught of fills and crashes during this track is something to behold. *Dart* is sublime with the call and response boy-meets-girl vocal layers that, along with Steward's signature voice and phrasing, characterise Screamfeeder's sound. *Bruises* is manic pop punk fun; people throw themselves around as Lloyd's echoes of "I know, I know, I know, I know" fill the room. *Explode Your Friends* is as powerful now as ever; even without the puns. A false start on *Dead to the World* is the only hiccup during the set, jumping straight over *Down the Drinker* and rearranging the playing order for only a few bars ("oh, we'll skip my song will we?" Lloyd is overheard to ask in fun) before the band realise and backtrack accordingly.

Softly, softly *Gravity* starts with intertwining voices lulling the crowd for only a minute as they know full well what's coming with the chorus. When it hits, the mass of movement and smiles in the room create enough positive energy to surely keep the amps powered if the circuits should blow. Lloyd's bass and naughty girl promises on *Ant* are a personal highlight, as is the true-to-the-album inclusion of her solo piano work *Helen's Theme*; the response to which seems to disappoint the lovely lady as many didn't seem to know how to respond to this departure from guitars and drums. *End of the Wire* wakes everyone up again and *Broken Ladder* slows everyone down just enough to prime them for the opus that is the closing track *Pigtails on a Rock* which is still confronting 'neath its veil of naive quirkiness. On the appearance of a saxophonist, we come to realise that



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this really is the end of *Kitten Licks* ...and what a wonderful way to see it out.

With time slipping away and the venue's licensed hours drawing to a close, Steward advised that they'd be playing some more songs but "not doing that leave the stage, come back to the stage thing" and thus the night was rounded out with b-sides *Summertime* and *Fooferon* and post- *Kitten Licks* singles *Triple Hook* and the joyous *Hi-Cs* slammed out as the sensational closer.

Throughout the night it became more than apparent that, while some might say their heyday is behind them, Screamfeeder have matured beautifully over the last thirteen years. Tim and Kellie's technical abilities have grown and their vocals have both developed a smoother, more confident sound. Tim and Dean's collaboration on *The Whats* has added a different energy to how they bounce off each other (and how Tim leaps and bounces off Dean's kick drum) and the whole vibe between the band is one that says what I did earlier about the music community here in general – we're old friends, but more than that, we're family. And while *Kitten Licks* is where it started, luckily for this room full of fans, it's certainly not where it ends.

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