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Screamfeeder

Saturday May 09, 2009 at 08:00 PM

Audience: 18 and over

The Troubadour

Level 2, 322 Brunswick St, Brisbane
QLD, 4006, Australia.

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Reviewing this Screamfeeder set should be easy. It's a known outcome: a full performance of their 1996 album, *Kitten Licks*. Let's see. Twelve tracks, two b-sides and a couple of more recent singles masquerading as loose change to round out the night. Easily done, so why bother?

That "why" is answered by a 200-strong crowd eager to recapture the vitality of their youths; to listen to an adolescent soundtrack played live. As for me, I'm not fooling anyone. I was eight years old in 1996, and more concerned with provoking the family cat than listening to noisy pop bands. But Screamfeeder are a fine noise-pop band. And *Kitten Licks*, a fine noise-pop album.

The prospect of a live album recreation calls to mind several outcomes. The first is a cash-grab scenario; the second provokes a cringe ("Are they serious?"); the third involves the same question, but with an excitable facial expression. It's this third scenario that's brought most of us to The Troubadour tonight. This is the Screamfeeder line-up that's remained largely intact since *Kitten Licks'* release: guitarist Tim Steward, bassist Kellie Lloyd and drummer Dean Shwreb. Their stated aim for this retrospective tour is a faithful recreation. And, as Steward bends a couple of strings during opener 'Static', I realise that everything's going to be OK. They're in control.

'Bridge Over Nothing' draws our attention to the percussive gymnastics of Shwreb, whose adherence to the show's ambitious aim is the most impressive. His drumming on the album is at once immaculate and innovative; to witness his rapid fills from the front row is exhilarating. Next comes 'Dart'. Momentary pauses fill the spaces between the song's opening chord phrases; islands of silence amid a sea of glorious, distorted noise. Lloyd sings the pre-chorus hook, before she and Steward overlap throughout the chorus. It is this guy-girl vocal interplay that characterises Screamfeeder. And it's fantastic.

As they launch into the 95 raucous seconds that comprise 'Bruises', I start to reflect on who this tour means more to – them or us. While it seems like an appreciative gesture to fans on the surface, they're also reliving feelings - live, tonight - that were first experienced 13 years ago. They're heavy thoughts for a rock show sure, and I wonder whether I'm placing too much weight on this concept.

Screamfeeder are halfway through the album now, although the purring sound at the beginning of 'Explode Your Friends' was either forgotten or omitted. Shwreb's only misstep is prematurely launching into mid-paced rocker 'Dead To The World' in place of 'Down The Drinker', one of four Lloyd-penned songs on the album.

Then comes 'Gravity', more archetypical Steward-Lloyd vocal interplay, and 'Ant', which was included on the original release in demo form. Lloyd plays a short piano piece known as 'Helen's Theme', before we're into the final bracket. Beanpole Steward splays his daddy long-legs across the stage whenever he's afforded a moment away from the microphone, while Shwreb is visibly drenched – another voyeuristic fortuity. Not that anyone's being ungrateful. Here's 'End Of The Wire', the only track on the album that vaguely inspires a desire to press "next". Here's 'Broken Ladder', another mid-paced rocker that feels dangerously close to being beyond Steward's vocal range. It was strained on the album; it's damned strained tonight. Here's Lloyd's 'Pigtails On A Rock', the album closer. Natural harmonics from both guitars produce dizzying feedback throughout the song. A saxophonist adds a warm tone as the song

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spirals into several minutes of instrumental bliss. It's glorious.

After 45 faithfully-recreated minutes, we're done with *Kitten Licks*. Its position within Australian rock reassured. All is well. Two b-sides from the same era are aired - 'Summertime' and 'Fooferon' - before later singles 'Triple Hook' and 'Hi Cs' conclude the "non-encore".

Screamfeeder have proven that "Don't Look Back" is a ridiculous fallacy.

by **Andrew McMillen**

"Mess+Noise: definitely not available in the supermarket"

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