

THE WAIFS

FILLMORE

November 18, 2004

HIGHWAY ONE 12 HOUR DRIVE



Checked into the venerable Fillmore to catch the Waifs after their long six month layaway after the birth of Vicki's first child. The Significant Other drove this one and we placidly followed along for a very pleasant ride.

The Waifs, a pair of sisters plus a talented guitarist from small towns in Australia, busted suddenly into the world music scene less than two years years ago with their magic mixture of roots folk, celtic rhythms,

old fashioned country R&B, Latin riffs, and straight ahead rock with all of its youth-infused energy.

In recording, they come off as highly sophisticated masters of blues and country idioms, but in concert they appear clearly as refreshingly innocent ingenues in the savage music business.

There were a fair number of "stage buzzes", as they say, during Thursday's performance, for this is a world class band that had laid off all practice for some six months before going on tour. But the infectious energy of a young band that still plays for the sheer enjoyment of the music could not be overcome.

For example, after playing a bootleg tape to an acquaintance who has personal familiarity with the likes of The Dead and Hot Tuna, the man exclaimed suddenly, "My God! These guys are good!"



In performance, it was interesting to see how the seamless orchestration of the CD's falls out clearly by role in live performance. No question that Josh is the guitar wizard who performs all of the tasty etudes and interludes in all of the songs, while it is Vicki Simpson who does all of the scortching mouth harp solos as well as substantially the gravel vocals. Behind the scenes, the lovely Donna Simpson plays rhythm guitar and adds supporting vocals, but appears to also add the majority of the most interesting song lyrics.

This all results in a very integrated and very satisfactory show, especially for those looking to repeat the experience of listening to the CD's. Personally, we felt the concert developed greatest energy when the performers decided to depart from the "performed as written" attitude. When Erin Mckeowen entered to break up the rote perform the CD material, the show got hot and very interesting as Erin slashed across the expected patterns with her F-hold semi-hollow bodied archtop. Erin is probably this year's most underrated performer for at 4 foot 6, the gal has more punch than most heavy metal "shredders" out there, for she can play not only fast but also well.



Her fancy name notwithstanding, she was born in Boston and got her degree from Brown University.

The Waifs got pulled out by loyal devoted fans for a double encore - - but it may be noted, the famed glitterball failed to ignite. And we feel that this is because the band was showing signs of a long layoff and a tendency to adhere to the comfortably familiar material. They really clicked when it came to performing brand new material -- despite the audience singalongs on the old stuff -- and when Erin came out the energy spiked significantly upwards for she pulled them away from Nashville-inflected rockabilly, and guided them all more towards their own original blues/celtic/folk/Aussie outback sound.