

**NOT SO SILENT NIGHT**  
**BILL GRAHAM CIVIC AUDITORIUM**  
**DECEMBER 9, 2005**



Went with the girls to our traditional Holiday concert, the annual Live 105 Not So Silent Night, held once again back at the Bill Graham Aud. This year, the concert returned to an eclectic lineup from its spate of solid thrash core punk which had rendered previous years a bit too much of a good thing. POD is fine. Linkin Park is fine. AFI is great. But put them all together with identical-sounding bands in a venue where sonic mud evolves from the hastily built soundsystems and one has, well a bit of tedium and sameness.

This year Live 105 put up on the stage Birdmonster, Autolux, Coheed & Cambria, Hot Hot Heat, Death Cab for Cutie, the White Stripes with the crowds clearly selling out the show primarily for the last two.

BIRDMONSTER



Birdmonster is a local band which was a winner in the Live 105 Battle of the Bands contest. We arrived at the end of what was reported to be a very energetic set due to BART problems in Oakland. Bummer.

COHEED & CAMBRIA



We arrived shortly before the very loud and very energetic Coheed & Cambria took the stage, having missed most of the Live 105 contest winners.



The band has been labeled, a bit unfairly, with the tag "Emo rock", which tends to wallow quite a bit in self pity and similar vices. C&C however, present a powerful synthesis of prog rock and goth with a bit of wild metal tossed in, and certainly have nothing at all to do in sound with Death Cab for Cutie, also tagged "Emo".. Their short set closed out with a remarkable ensemble instrumental reminiscent of -- god forbid -- The Grateful Dead's "Space" but done with edgy discipline and firm melodic structure, something never characteristic of the Dead even at their finest.

It's too bad their lyrics, which have a number of critics raving, got entirely lost in the usual sonic mud of the Civic, but that ten minute closer really blew the doors off of the place. Wish they could have stayed longer.

## HOT HOT HEAT



Hot Hot Heat hail from Victoria, B.C., a town best known for imitating the queen's England in the service of tourism. And in truth, with the guitarist and bassist done in the best of English mod style with pointy shoes and black tuxedos, we all thought they had just hopped across the pond. Their music, however, fuses punk, new wave and British synth pop, with vocalist Steve Bays rocking out on a center-stage synthesizer piano. Bays proved to rise about the sound system with clearly understood vocals backed by lean and tight rhythm section, indicating that real pros know how to handle the problems of a difficult venue. These guys are a fun band who enjoy performing their very danceable music.



DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE



Much attention has duly been focused on singer/lyricist Ben Gibbard, who has risen above the rest by attending to the musicianship of his vocals where others simply resort to screaming. In fact, his voice is very reminiscent of early

Donovan. He fronts a Seattle-based quartet that is most often described and picking up where Built to Spill left off in the indie-pop realm. They are a little more thoughtful than Built to Spill, their intimidating band name notwithstanding, and they are very listenable. And that Ben Gibbard has all the women melting under that doe-eyed gaze of his, so these guys are very likely to continue to do well and most likely, after well over a decade of paying dues, will emerge with their latest effort, "Transatlanticism" into the top 40.



A close look at the lyrics reveals a much more personal – and well-thought out – sensibility than presented by Jacob Dylan of the Wallflowers with a greater desire to experiment and expand the musical range on stage. Their presence at a Live 105 concert indicates a greater willingness in the promoters and the station to vary the dynamics and scope of the format, both in the concert venue

and on the airwaves, which is a welcome relief from the trending-to-monotony of incessant thrash-core stuff. It also better reflects the musical tastes of the diverse KITS crowd.

### WHITE STRIPES



The sold out venue was fully packed by the time the odd couple from Detroit of Meg and Jack White took the stage. The White Stripes have all the critics raving and many of the critics snarling in such a way that its difficult to be objective from the get go. The band is nonexistent: its just the two on stage, with Meg White rapping out the beat, and not much else, on the drums, leaving Jack to perform vocals and guitar. It's a stripped sound for sure, but in reality Jack

makes so much noise with a slight echo effect on the vocal and definite fuzz on the amp that they sound like a quartet.



The crowd obviously loved them, although signs of trouble in this outfit preceded them to the stage.

In style, Jack's playing is much like R.L. Burnside, and it was no surprise to find he has covered more than a couple of the late great bluesman's songs. He does not get flashy (on the fretboard), or engage in finger flourishes with which so many capable musicians pack their songs. It's just straight ahead blues rock. That being said in their favor, the extremely offputting aspect about them is their arch, self-conscious pretension. They affect costumes of white and red or red and black and their stage instruments were self-consciously designed with those



visuals in mind: black piano, red guitar, red & white drum set, red and white tubular bells, etc. Well, all right, that's a schtick and its all show business.

But apparently they are seriously, deadly earnest. Here's a quote from Rolling Stone: "Jack and Meg White are without doubt the strangest, most fascinating couple to surface from the US in the past four years.

Jack's life in particular has become something of a soap opera. There's been brawling (with Jason Von Bondie), a Hollywood romance (Renee Zellweger), car crashes and now his sudden marriage to 25-year-old model Karen Elson on the eve of this latest release. All very odd but completely engrossing stuff."

Then there is the habit of the two in presenting silly misinformation, such as the statement they had been married, followed by a denial and a statement that they were brother and sister. And Jack's hissy fit when he stalked off of the stage after a balloon hit him mid-song. Oh really.

Yeah, well. All of this backstage antic stuff is really boring and hardly shows a candle to the excesses of so many others, and ultimately is a real turn-off. Just put on some jeans and play your damn guitar, Jack.

The best analysis of the duo was done by an obscure blogger at happyrobot.net. This fellow loved the WS when he first heard them, liked them alot the second time, but the third time, the sheen was off. A band that runs as a schtick gets old and the circumstances that elevated them in the first place have changed. They are no longer the new strange kids in town.

In fact the reviewer was of the opinion that in Jack's refusal to evolve and Meg's refusal to play the drums they are willfully self-destructing. Well, self-destruction is hardly new in rock music as well and so we are left with predictable spectacle about to happen. Sure wish it wouldn't for the same reasons that everybody loved them from the start: they were new and fresh and dared do something different while skipping the formulas.

Here are some of happyrobot's closing comments:

"They're through because of their stupid, self-defeating rules about rules. Though I doubt they'll suffer -- it's obviously a death-wish. It's not the artificiality of it that irks me, it's the romance.

There's something dishonest about The White Stripes, something high. I've read that Jack White is not ironic. Whatever. But let's not assume that he's without device. Sure, I think he's serious about what he does, and far be it from me to lay claims to his tastes, his influences, or his real true inner being. They turned down a Gap ad -- an act that in today's culture is the mark of spiritual superiority, though it's semantics to me. The Stripes are talked about like they're the Holden Caulfield's of rock because they reject the modern world -- well, parts of it anyway. Their exclusions might carry more weight if they weren't so easy and negative. I'd be more likely to be impressed if instead of the liner notes reading No computers were used during the writing, recording, mixing, or mastering of this record, they read, No phones were used in the booking of any of our shows. Come off it."

And this is all from a guy who says he likes them. Of course we like them: they are still energetic and fun and quirky. And there always is that moment when Jack forgets all the bulls—t when he quite obviously loses himself into the performance. That's what they call in the Biz, The Moment, and most players spend their entire lives trying to have just one of those with the crowd in rapture, while Jack seems to make one – at least one – every time he gets on stage. Just wish they would come down from the high horse and play the music. After all, at the end of the day, its really all about the music. And its only Rock and Roll.