

NSSN

BILL GRAHAM CIVIC

DECEMBER 8, 2006



As a part of the Family Tradition, we all trundled over in several cars to the Bill Graham Civic in Babylon for the annual Not So Silent Night hosted by That Other Radio Station. You know, the one that Big Rick left because he wanted to be among mature adults.

We know, we know. We should have chosen KFOG's Concerts for Kids or Neil's Bridge School Benefit, but we were young then -- quite a long time ago -- and as time passed, we found that NSSN became the well-placed seasonal thing on which the immature adults and the kids could all agree. And so the years passed with memories of Courtney Love pouring a bag of heroin out upon the stage and tossing a guitar out into the audience. Of the lead singer for Garbage striding across the strobe-lit stage with her ponytail flying out behind. Of Gavin

Rossdale (Bush) bathed in a spot during "Glycerine." Of Iggy Pop waving his arms, shirtless as usual, during "Lust for Life". Of Incubus chanting, "Wish You Were Here". Of the lead singer for Papa Roach spinning around on his back like a dying version of his namesake. Of David Byrne playing alone up there with an acoustic guitar way back before acoustic became even a rumor of popular. And many more memories besides.

This year the angry thrash metal post-punk noise gave way to a little more style, a little more musicality , and a little more joy, perhaps in expectation that the times they are a'changin' from the sour expletive ridden indigestion of the past twelve years or so. Common sense is on the wind, for once and people are desperate for good tidings after hard times, nevermind the nonsense of the meaningless "economic reports".

We coasted into Babylon hours after the 5:30 doors opening to scramble for seating in the General Admission hall, which sold out every last ticket 72 hours after announcement. Our Island-Life Social Coordinator managed to secure tix only because she belongs to a pre-sale exposure group.

We slid inside in time to catch the Shins for their entire set.

THE SHINS

The Shins are a musical group on Sub Pop records comprising singer and guitarist James Russell Mercer, keyboardist/guitarist/bassist Martin Crandall, bassist/guitarist Dave Hernandez, and drummer Jesse Sandoval. The Wikipedia describes their indie sound as deriving from "Beach Boys, country, and folk", which is certainly not doing much justice to this far edgier group. Friday night, the feeling was pure no-nonsense rock with not a trace of pretense. They have also been compared to Pink Floyd, Love and Moby Grape, with perhaps the latter the most accurate comparo. It was refreshing to encounter this bit of innovative pop replacing the thrashing noise of previous NSSN's.

THE RACONTEURS



Jack White is one of those gifted fellows you really want to do well, even as he falls down into his own vomit in the gutter after yet another night of hopeless carousal with bimbo models in Paris. For about ten years, he had presented an uneven, choppy, frequently tedious bombastic presence relieved by flashes of sheer genius, for which flashes throngs stood in line to sell out each and every performance. Fortunately, it seems he may have just found his best combo, after ducking his hopelessly inadequate drummer Meg White, who is universally acknowledged as having been the main drag on Jack with her total inability to learn or employ her instrument with any degree of ability.

This, in a duo band, is not very good.

White's new band, formed with friend and fellow Detroit musician Brendan Benson is backed up by a rhythm section of Jack Lawrence and Patrick Keeler of

The Greenhornes, who Jack previously enlisted to play on Loretta Lynn's 2004 album *Van Lear Rose* produced an album titled "Broken Boy Soldiers", which Amazon.com calls "this is a grit-under-the-fingernails rock offering, but with an ear for eclecticism that brings to mind classic rock touchstones from the Beatles' *Revolver* to Led Zep's *Physical Graffiti*."



At last, Jack has the stuff behind him to back up his best and on Friday night he had the SRO crowd screaming from the pit right up to the farthest corners of the stands. And with capable musicians to lock him into place, his operatic motions were limited to a bombastic opening and unnecessary

screaming into an oddly placed vocal mike placed to the rear left of the drum kit, forcing the guy to actually play music in some fashion. His seat was the only set of the entire evening which successfully overcame the hollow acoustics of the BGC Auditorium.

Their tightest and best crafted song is the poppy "Steady as She Goes". Any number of critics out there say that Jack White is unpredictable but here to stay for quite a long time. We think that is a good thing and his latest project indicates a willingness to let the Rock Star thing exhale a bit in favor of real performance.

MODEST MOUSE

The Wikipedia states that this band "was formed in 1993 in Issaquah, Washington by guitarist Isaac Brock, drummer Jeremiah Green and bassist Eric Judy. Since being signed to Sony's Epic Records in 2000, the band has attained significant popular success. Elements of Modest Mouse's sound have been likened to or have inspired those of Elliot Smith, Spoon, Pixies, Radiohead, and numerous other [alternative rock] bands."

The band's name derives from a phrase in a Virginia Woolf story, "The Mark on the Wall."

The band surfaced in 2004 with the hit "Float On", but has had recent membership changes and instability due to mental illness afflicting various members. In performance, the drummer's solidly persistent 8th note kick locks the rhythm more than usually into a very tight ensemble. All members are multi-instrumentalists and it was a real pleasure to hear and see the repetitive drum,

bass, guitar yield to keyboards, accordion, and banjo. The vocals from Brock remain curt and snap as that 8th note drum -- no polysyllabic lyrics here.



The Mouse had quite a challenge to follow the raucous Raconteurs, but built their set with logical precision into a wonderfully anarchic closer which had Brock dashing back and forth from monitor to amp to supply feedback that tied into the melodic line. Neat trick, that one. No opera and no drama, just straight-ahead rock, and that's the sort of thing we like. Sort of a frenetic energy reminiscent of Gang of Four. Mike Powers and Big Rick on KFOG have picked up on their new CD of nautical tales titled "We Were Dead Before the Ship Even Sank" and the guitar mags are all doing full-page spreads, indicating that the Mouse may be in cross-over breakthrough mode.

THE KILLERS

This is what Ricky Wright said on Amazon.com about The Killers. "The Killers match postpunk guitars with a synthesizer overlay that recalls '80s New Wave without burying their sound in nostalgia. On their debut, *Hot Fuss*, frontman Brandon Flowers plumbs his imagination for tales of murdered lovers ("Jenny Was a Friend of Mine," "Midnight Show"), voyeurism ("Mr. Brightside"), and sexual confusion (the single "Somebody Told Me"), Flowers and his mates are obviously canny students; the total effect is of a playacted obsession, but one made irresistible by their skillful, catchy songs. If there's an occasional misstep (the painfully earnest line "I got soul but I'm not a soldier" from "All These Things That I've Done"), it seems of a piece with the Killers' influences. As it is, *Hot Fuss*

is one of several recent releases that bring a diverting faux glamour to the mainstream rock scene."

Friday night, Brandon strode on stage in a tight pinstripe suit, the epitome of "The sharp-dressed man" and proceeded to fling every theatrical gesture from stage and talkie screen up there until the sweat poured off of the man. Can you say, "Brandon, you are soooo gaaaay!" We knew you could. Notwithstanding stage mugging flamboyance, the Killers cranked out a full length set that had people scrambling for the last BART trains past midnight even as the band played on.

If your band had enjoyed pre-band careers like these guys, you too would play every moment to the hilt. Flowers, who had dropped out of college, was a bellhop for a while at the Gold Coast Hotel in Las Vegas. David Keuning, who was originally from Pella, Iowa, dropped out of Kirkwood Community College, then the University of Iowa, and finally moved to Las Vegas in January of 2000. He worked there at a Banana Republic store, stating that it was a terrible job and he finally quit when a new manager was appointed and he wouldn't allow Dave to listen to music in the backroom. Mark Stoermer worked as a medical courier, delivering various medical supplies while studying philosophy at UNLV. Ronnie Vannucci was a student of classical percussion at UNLV to become a teacher and worked as a photographer at the Little Chapel of the Flowers and as a pedicab driver at the Desert Passage mall inside the Aladdin Hotel.

Due to that BART limitation, we had to perforce buck out even before they approached the song before the encore. Too bad, as it is long since that the NSSN stage has featured a sense of style rather than senseless noise.