

July 24, 2008

"The rust, dust, the wicked child"



What can I say about the triumphant Mirrors set at the Beachland this past Saturday? Driving through downtown Cleveland on my way up, I felt that usual sense of anticipation that I've always gotten whenever that skyline comes into view, but I honestly didn't know what to expect. Sure, I've listened to Mirrors way back when I was a young man in high school (you believe I didn't want to play football for the coach?). But as far as I know, Mirrors hadn't played anywhere since those days 13 or so years ago, and the only hints I'd gotten as to how their set might sound were off old live tracks from the *Another Nail in the Coffin* reissue. Those live tracks (from the mid-80's Mirrors reunion, I presume) are solid -- amped up, raw, (3 piece?) garage takes on Mirrors classics, old and (then) new -- but I guess I was wondering whether the reunited band, some 30+ years after its original incarnation, would go for that kind of breakneck pace for an entire set.

I suppose deep down I was hoping for a live version of that brilliantly-weird, old-school-lo-fi, Velvets-in-Cleveland mid-70's Mirrors sound documented so well on the *Those Were Different Times* and *Hands in My Pockets* discs. I've seen enough underwhelming reunion shows, though, so I guess I suppressed that hope. After all, suppressing hope is the Cleveland way.

I shouldn't have worried, 'cause I ended up getting my wish. From the moment the band took stage and "warmed up" with a brief "Interstellar Overdrive" leading into a dead-on performance of "She Smiled Wild," Mirrors showed that, amazingly, they haven't lost a step. Jim Crook's guitar was smoking. The vocals of Jamie Klimek, Paul Marotta, and Craig Bell were strong throughout. And Paul Laurence's drumming kept everything together (except perhaps for the cowbell that threatened to blow it all apart). There was the occasional rough patch, which was understandable for a band playing a one-off show. Those brief moments aside, the evening was electric: passages of beautiful noise; driving, Moe Tucker drums (minimal cymbal!); cosmic archetypal guitar; and classic, intelligent but coolly playful songs, truly Cleveland.

Often when you see a band for the first time after having listened to their records forever, the band might not live up to the sort of mystical conception you've developed from those records. I think it's a sign of a great band when the live performance is able to surpass this internal, mystical conception ("classic"-era Guided by Voices or current Times New Viking jump out in my mind). Maybe it's a sign of an all-time great band when, after they haven't performed as a unit for forever, the live show is able to surpass a decades-old mystical conception. Mirrors did just that, and I think a decent part of the audience, filled with Cle rock all-stars (you could count on Steve-O being there, but Bernie from Bernie & the Invisibles?!?!), would agree with me.

Highlights included "We'll See," a dynamic "Sweet Refrain," "How Could I" (a personal favorite), and the rollicking "Penthouse Legend." Bell shined in taking the lead vocal during "Annie," which topped the list of songs I wanted to hear. And Marotta ruled on what might be the true Cle rock anthem, "Jaguar Ride."

I'll stop babbling, but really, this was one of the best shows I've seen in a while. After years of never thinking I'd get to see Mirrors play, I count myself lucky that I was able to witness it. Down here in Columbus, it maybe is a bit disappointing that the Electric Eels get all the attention while bands like Mirrors and the Styrenes go a bit ignored. Sure, the Eels stuff relates more directly to (and informs a good deal of) the great stuff happening here in Columbus, and they're rightly hailed. Maybe Mirrors are a bit too Cleveland for Columbus, but that's not gonna stop me from chatting 'em up around here.

So yeah, Mirrors definitely delivered Saturday night. How 'bout making this an annual thing, fellas?