

Talent In Action

JASON & THE SCORCHERS

Park West, Chicago
Tickets: \$6.50

There are few things more satisfying than watching your favorite unsigned underground band make the transition from obscurity to—well, if not fame just yet, maybe proto-fame—with all their guts, charm and lunacy intact. Their last time through Chicago a few months ago, Jason & the (formerly Nashville) Scorchers were attached to the intrepid little Praxis label, "playing with all our heart and guts," as Jason put it, in front of a packed Tuts house—not quite yet in the public eye, but getting there.

On March 27 they returned triumphant, this time playing the 600-seat Park West (to a not overflowing but certifiably fanatic house), their critically acclaimed Praxis EP "Fervor" now re-mixed, augmented, and re-released by EMI America, their video "Absolutely Sweet Marie" in rotation on MTV, and their record receiving AOR exposure locally via WXRT and WLUP.

Any fears that Jason & the Scorchers would tone down their previously bananas stage show due to their newfound respectability were allayed the minute they hit the stage in full frontal assault, singer Jason Ringenberg sporting his favorite leopard skin and rhinestone cowboy hat, smokin' guitarist Warner Hodges traversing the stage in typical white-lightning frenzy, drummer Perry Baggs as single-mindedly ferocious as ever, and even normally tranquil bassist Jeff Johnson in constant motion.

Jason & the Scorchers' country & western crossed with a machine gun is some of the most rabble-raising stuff you're likely to hear, funny as hell but at the same time sweetly sincere. Head-bangin'-twangin' numbers like "Both Sides Of The Line" and "Help There's A Fire" exhibited a real affection for their country roots, and Jason even obliged true believers with a couple of tear-jerking ballads, complete with hiccupping sobs.

Jason & the Scorchers provide rockers and honky-tonkers alike with some of the freshest, funniest, wildest rock'n'roll around. They're just beginning to make some noise and when they do, watch out. **MOIRA McCORMICK**

MIDNIGHT OIL

The Palace, Los Angeles
Tickets: \$10.00

Midnight Oil's first U.S. tour was preceded by an enormous amount of media attention; the Australian band has been ballyhooed for months for its strong political stance and homeland popularity. Perhaps if they had hit these shores unawares, they would have made a better impression.

They came to Los Angeles for a two-night run starting March 30, opening to a full house ripe with high expectations. And vocalist Peter Garrett was every bit as imposing as his magazine photos promised him to be: six feet, five inches tall, billiard-bald, Garrett moves like a berserk robot. His presence is other-worldly; he looks like a leftover bad guy from "Blade Runner." Still, a startling lead vocalist isn't always enough.

"Power And The Passion," "Short Memory"

and "Read About It" (from the Columbia album "10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1") are powerful, meaty songs, and the set was well-paced and varied. But political lyrics aren't easy to comprehend when delivered in Oil's scattershot manner, and buzzwords like "Cambodia," "Hiroshima" and "Big Macs" seem too easy a target. Jim Moginie's keyboard work was impressive and Rob Hirst's drumming energetic, though Martin Rotsey's guitar never sparkled above the mix. After a while, the group seemed to be attempting to get its message across with a sledgehammer.

The highlight of the 75-minute set was the encore, when guest Charles McMahon came on to play an Aboriginal didgeridu. The instrument looks like a shofar and sounds like a bull-frog croaking in tune, and the crowd loved it.

Midnight Oil makes a nice contrast to a surfeit of airhead pop bands, and deserves credit for keeping true to its ideals. Maybe America just isn't the most fertile ground for a band whose "power and passion" is its disapproval of things American. **ETHLIE ANN VARE**

CRUSADERS ANITA BAKER

Beverly Theatre, Beverly Hills
Tickets: \$15, \$13

The augmented Crusaders, featuring stand-bys Joe Sample and Wilton Felder, along with new drummer Leon Ndugu Chanler, have gone "uptown" but still get down.

The group's midnight show here March 17 followed the release of their dance-oriented album, "Ghetto Blaster." The aura of the show was also disco, with all the instruments blending into a oneness to captivate dancers. In fact, the effect was too much disco. Sample's terrific keyboarding, for example, was often submerged too deeply into the nine pieces, all of which were db-ed too greatly at this concert.

However, Felder, doubling on alto and tenor, is perfect for his lead role as horn man setting the melodic theme. His sound is penetrating yet always gorgeous. And Chanler, now a full-fledged co-principal (replacing original member Stix Hooper), is a versatile musician. He easily ran the gamut from jazz to mainstream rock.

The backup consisted of three electric guitars, electric bass, synthesizers and percussion. Both David T. Walker and Barry Finnerty, who split guitar leads, are excellent. Walker's picking is so unusual that some progressive movie producer should try his mellow meanderings for a soundtrack. Finnerty plays primarily modern, skirting on the fringes of jazz and blues in his soloing.

Bobby Womack made an unscheduled appearance, working out on two numbers, the best of which showed his sacred soul side. Singer Vesta Williams was featured on the group's 1979 anthem "Street Life," which was the rouser of the evening.

Detroit's Anita Baker, who opened the show, is a promising newcomer with a challenging voice and a unique style. The audience dug her every lyric and move. Baker was poured into a metallic-like black gown and used plenty of body language.

JOHN SIPP

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

The Savoy, New York
Tickets: \$12.50

A Bunnyman concert is not a joyous, buoyant party. It's a serious event, drawing a devoted crowd that becomes almost hypnotically transfixed by the carefully arranged performance.

Entering in a billowing cloud of smoke to the accompaniment of recorded Gregorian chants, the young English quartet solemnly played their rich, multi-textured compositions with authority, each member rapt in his own role.

Lead singer and rhythm guitarist Ian McCulloch, who didn't try to incite the crowd and spoke only to announce a few of the titles, gave most of his energy over to his passionate vocals. His control, holding a firm grip in his lower register, loosening in the higher range, was excellent and held up well over the course of the 80-minute show.

So, too, was the work of drummer Pete de Freitas and bassist Les Pattinson, who produced an unassuming but relentlessly furious ground for the group's songs. Ex-group mem-

although lead guitarist Will Sergeant did control some synthesizer tracks during a few of the songs.

Sergeant's playing was exceptional, reaching a peak with the group's best known song, "The Cutter." Opening with jangling chords and continuing with charging power, Sergeant deftly shook the hall, but, like McCulloch, made no attempt at stagey bravado.

The Bunnymen are often likened to psychedelic bands like the Doors and English political rockers like U2; a "Light My Fire" chorus during "Read It In Books," occasional strobe lighting, and fog (which became almost unbearably thick) certainly attested to these influences. But the deliberate composure of the musicians—though it may hinder them from attaining the popularity here that they have in the U.K.—is a refreshing contrast to those near-icorns, and one hopes that the band continues to mature with success. **KATHY GILLIS**

LOU RAWLS

Venetian Room, Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco
Cover: \$17

Concluding his two-week engagement here Mar. 4, Lou Rawls showed once again why he is such a superb supper-club entertainer, ranging effortlessly from beefy blues to satiny pop and midtempo soul ballads, all of it done with just the right touch of nonchalant elegance that has long been the Rawls trademark.

From an opener of "Dancing To The Music," Rawls slid into "Lady Love" and "Unchained Melody." He then alternated beautiful crooners like "Love Is A Hurlin' Thing" with blues/r&b medleys covering items like "Stormy Monday," "Credit Card Blues" and "I've Got A Right To Sing The Blues." He even threw in a take of his well-known Budweiser commercial, which in this setting hardly sounded like the tv huckster's theme it is.

Rawls rounded out his hour with a shimmering version of his best-known song, "You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine," and then encored with "The Wind Beneath My Wings," offering the strongest and most moving version to date of that already off-covered song.

JACK McDONOUGH

VIRGIN STEELE

Rio Theater, Valley Stream, L.I.
Admission: \$8

A self-managed Long Island quartet, Virgin Steele is a heavy metal outfit that operates above the "bang-your-head" mentality. During their hour-plus set March 24, they displayed the influences of such blues-based metallurgists of the '70s as Deep Purple and Uriah Heep.

Guitarist Jack Starr is a creative technician who leads the group with precise, forceful fretwork. Highlights of his performance were the use of note-bending riffs taking off from the "Addams Family" tv theme and "Green-sleeves," and several spacious solos. Vocalist David DeFeis has that requisite high-register scream and flaunted a three-octave range that rose easily above the high-decibel drumming of Joey Ayzavian. An energetic performer, DeFeis intoned the right amount of doom and drama into the group's hellbound numbers and kept the audience constantly on its feet.

Drawing on original material from three albums, Virgin Steele maintained a consistent melody in its music without diminishing its gut-level impact. Without degrading their chosen genre or insulting hardcore fans, Virgin Steele has a good shot at tapping a market that includes leather-clad teens, yet goes far beyond.

KIM FREEMAN

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AMUSEMENT BUSINESS Boxscore

The following are among the top concert grosses nationwide reported through the survey week. Included are act(s), gross, attendance, capacity of facility, ticket prices, promoter, facility, city, number of shows, number of sellouts and dates(s).

- **BILLY JOEL—\$426,300, 14,210, \$15**, Jam Productions, Rosemont Horizon Theater, Chicago, sellout, March 30-31.
- **VAN HALEN, AUTOGRAPH—\$282,757, 21,940, \$13.50 & \$12.50**, Don Law Company, Providence Civic Center, Rhode Island, sellout March 17-18.
- **BILLY JOEL—\$247,366, 16,629, \$15**, DiCesare-Engler Productions, Civic Arena, Pittsburgh, PA., sellout, March 24.
- **DURAN DURAN—\$235,467, 18,020 (20,604), \$13.50 & \$12.50**, Don Law Company, The Centrum, Worcester, Mass., March 14-15.
- **BILLY JOEL—\$221,225, 15,509, \$15 & \$12.50**, Don Law Company, Boston (Mass.) Garden, sellout, March 26.
- **YES—\$207,473, 15,556, \$13.75 & \$11.75**, Avalon Attractions, The Forum, Inglewood, Calif., sellout, March 28.
- **VAAN HALEN—\$190,397, 14,287, \$13.50 & \$12.50**, Cross Country Concerts, Hartford (Conn.) Civic Center, sellout, March 29.
- **DURAN DURAN, SWINGING RICHARD—\$177,673, 13,630, \$13.50**, Pace Concerts, Omni, Atlanta, sellout, March 29.
- **VAN HALEN, AUTOGRAPH—\$145,215, 11,170, \$13.50 & \$12.50**, Don Law Company, The Centrum, Worcester, Mass., sellout, March 16.
- **DURAN DURAN, A NEW PERSONALITY—\$137,060, 10,000, \$13.75**, Silver Star/Albert Promotions, Lakeland (Fla.) Civic Center, sellout, March 26.
- **DURAN DURAN—\$128,837, 10,583, \$12.50**, Silver Star/Albert Promotions, Jacksonville (Fla.) Coliseum, sellout March 25.
- **BILLY IDOL, UPTONES—\$126,037, 10,083, \$12.50**, Bill Graham Presents, Oakland (Calif.) Coliseum, sellout, March 23.
- **WAYNE NEWTON—\$125,408, 6,489 (7,344), \$22.50 & \$20.50**, Contemporary Productions, Painter's Mill Theater, Awlingsmill, MD, three shows, March 23-25.
- **.38 SPECIAL, GOLDEN EARRING—\$122,377, 9,854 (12,604), \$12.75**, Pace Concerts, The Summit, Houston, TX., March 30.
- **BILLY JOEL—\$120,810, 8,132, \$15**, Silver Star/Fantasia, Bay Front Center, St. Petersburg, Fla., sellout, March 17.
- **JUDAS PRIEST—\$115,377, 9,494 (11,200), \$12.50 & \$11.50**, Don Law Company, The Centrum, Worcester, Mass., March 26.
- **AMY GRANT, MICHAEL W. SMITH, GARY CHAPMAN—\$111,082, 12,130, \$9.50 & \$8.50**, Terry Garland Productions, Seattle Center Arena, Seattle, Wash., two sellouts, March 28-29.
- **YES—\$107,125, 8,570 (13,460), \$12.50**, Evening Star Productions, Coliseum, Phoenix, Ariz., March 22.
- **OZZY OSBOURNE, MOTLEY CRUE—\$105,450, 9,933, \$12.50**, Evening Star Productions, Tucson (Ariz.) Arena, sellout, March 14.
- **HANK WILLIAMS—\$100,202, 7,859 (7,970), \$12.75**, Alex Cooley Productions, Fox Theater, Atlanta, two shows, March 30.
- **THE PRETENDERS, THE ALARM—\$76,774, 6,920, \$11.50**, Pace Concerts, Sam Houston Coliseum, Houston, TX., sellout, March 20.
- **YES—\$74,618, 5,974 (14,418), \$12.50 & \$11.50**, Evening Star Productions, Tucson (Ariz.) McKale Center, March 23.
- **JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP, DAN ROSS AND THE BRUNETTES—\$73,761, 8,000, \$11.50**, Sunshine Productions, Hallman Civic Center, Terre Haute, Ind., sellout, March 28.
- **BLUE OYSTER CULT, ALDO NOVA, ACCEPT—\$69,656, 7,318 (9,900), \$10.50 & \$9.50**, Sound Seventy Productions, Municipal Auditorium, Nashville, March 24.
- **.38 SPECIAL, GOLDEN EARRING—\$67,292, 5,842 (6,888), \$12 & \$11**, Contemporary Productions, Prairie Capitol Convention Center, Springfield, Ill., March 14.
- **JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP, DAN ROSS AND THE BRUNETTES—\$64,963, 5,017, \$13.50 & \$12.50**, Brass Ring Productions, Fox Theater, Detroit, Mich., sellout, March 29.
- **.38 SPECIAL, GOLDEN EARRING—\$61,724, 5,529 (7,388), \$11.50 & \$10.50**, Pace Concerts, Austin (TX.) Special Events Center, March 31.
- **BILL GAITHER TRIO—\$60,223, 7,762, \$9 & \$8**, Spring House Associates, Lakeland (Fla.) Civic Center, sellout, March 24.
- **TED NUGENT, MICHAEL SCHENKER GROUP—\$47,121, 3,800, \$13.50 & \$12.50**, Evening Star Productions, Mesas (Ariz.) Amphitheater, sellout, March 25.
- **AMY GRANT, MICHAEL W. SMITH, GARY CHAPMAN—\$56,383, 6,084, \$9.50 & \$8.50**, Terry Garland Productions, Civic Auditorium, Portland, Oregon, two sellouts, March 31.
- **ADAM ANT, THE ROMANTICS—\$49,362, 4,558 (5,000), \$12 & \$11**, Contemporary Productions, Civic Auditorium, Omaha, Neb., March 24.
- **PETRA—\$41,415, 7,395 (8,033), \$8, \$7 & \$6**, Lakeview Christian Center/Petrified Productions, Market Square, Indianapolis, Ind., March 31.
- **ADAM ANT, THE ROMANTICS—\$41,177, 3,289 (3,557), \$13.50 & \$12.50**, Contemporary Productions, Kiel Opera House, St. Louis, March 28.
- **CONWAY TWITTY, RONNIE MCDOWELL—\$40,840, 4,348 (7,443), \$10**, Jayson Promotions, Bicentennial Center, Salina, Kan., March 24.
- **THE PRETENDERS, THE ALARM—\$39,285, 2,958, \$13.75**, Pace Concerts/Barry Mendelson Presents, Sanger Theater, New Orleans, sellout, March 21.
- **JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP—\$38,005, 2,698, \$15 & \$12.50**, Cross Country Concerts, Bushnell Auditorium, Hartford, Conn., sellout, April 1.
- **AMY GRANT, MICHAEL W. SMITH, GARY CHAPMAN—\$33,032, 3,230, \$10.50 & \$9.50**, Terry Garland Productions, Civic Auditorium, San Jose, Calif., sellout, April 2.
- **JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP, DAN ROSS AND THE BRUNETTES—\$35,707, 2,671, \$13.50**, Contemporary Productions, Civic Center, Des Moines, Iowa, sellout, March 25.
- **EURYTHMICS, REAL LIFE—\$34,894, 2,800, \$13 & \$12**, Don Law Company, Orpheum, Boston, Mass., sellout, March 24.
- **ADAM ANT, THE ROMANTICS—\$33,994, 3,147 (5,200), \$12.50 & \$11**, Contemporary Productions, Five Flags Center, Dubuque, Iowa, March 23.

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