The Boomtown Rats sell out

The Boomtown Rats, Private Lightning, and Luna at the Orpheum March 17 (Saint Patrick’s Day). I had been hanging around at The Tech’s office for a while when a call came in from a promoter in California. Would I like a free pair of tickets to see the Boomtown Rats in concert so I could review them in the paper? It was time to think fast. The band had put out a pretty good debut album a few years ago. The cover had featured members of the band wrapped in large baggies. The songs were fun, fast, British-sounding new wave.

"OK, I’ll take them. Thanks." After I got off the phone, I tried to think of any other details I knew about the band. There had been two more albums, including a new one called The Fine Art of Surfacing, and a hit single, "Don’t Like Mondays." For some reason, though, I hadn’t heard anything else from the second and third albums played on the new wave radio shows I listened to. Hmm...

Sitting around before the concert, as I watched the roadies setting up, my date was looking around at the audience. "You know," she said, "the audience all looks about 16 years old." "Nonsense," I said (without looking up). "They don’t play new wave on the kiddie stations.*"

Luna soon took the stage, and mainly impressed me as being one of the ugliest bands I have ever seen. Their material was basically palatable pop ballads, and they were given the usual Don Law opening act treatment of atrocious lighting and sound, Private Lightning was up next. I haven’t seen a band which looks so comfortable and happy performing since the Who played New York. They smiled at each other and at the audience, watched each other’s solos, and appeared to be having a really good time playing their music. They, too, were rather pop-oriented, though their electric violins add an interesting effect. At last, on came the Rats. Bob Geldof, the lead singer, quickly made it plain that he was the star of the show as he pranced around the stage like Frank Sinatra on Mondays.* For some reason, though, I couldn’t resist ending the album with "Sold Out," on the other hand, has fine moments, but the album as a whole was rather pop-oriented, though their electric violins add an interesting effect.

The first thing most people seem to notice about the Fools’ album, Sold Out, is that it doesn’t contain "Psycho Chicken." Strange until you realize that these are fool plaid flannel shirt and jeans) The crowd who wish to be taken seriously.

The album holds ten cuts which cover a reasonable spectrum of styles with varying degrees of success. In fact, they seem so eager to show their capabilities that the album’s diversity sometimes seems like a lack of continuity. One thing which stands out from the beginning is Rich Bartlett’s skillful lead guitar. Although he rarely gets the chance to break loose and show off, he really does shine when the time comes, and adapts perfectly to the rapidly-varying musical styles of the band.

Most songs on the album are rather long—perhaps too long, at least for my tastes and attention span. Almost all are over three minutes, and most are between 3½ and four minutes. Songs have to be something special to hold up for that long, and though the Fools’ songwriting is good, it is not good enough to stretch.

"Night Out" starts the album with a jumpy number. It deals with the old theme of "what should I do tonight" and "wow, look at that girl" all in one. Next, they slow down with the less successful ballad of second thoughts "Fine With Me." This one reminds me of too many other juvenile breaking-up songs. "Don’t Tell Me" gets the pace going again with some really keen bass riffs from Doug Forman, though the words are nothing exciting.

"Sold Out," on the other hand, has fine words but is marred with a boring melody. In lyrics which remind me of the Kinks, they describe someone’s easy decision to "sell out all the way." I can’t have been in movies

Bob Geldof of the Boomtown Rats

"Sad Story" is a satirical attack at a red love ballad which drags on for an unbearable 4½ minutes. Side two starts with "Mutual of Omaha," a very clever song about a man who, fed up with his boring desk job and suburban lifestyle, decides to disappear from it. He books a plane ticket, checks his insurance policy, last push, pulls his car off a cliff, and catches a plane to someplace warm.

Everybody (even me) has heard the organ-influenced "It’s a Night For Beautiful Girls" on the radio. This is their second dense tape, and gets loads of airplay because of the fame of you-know-which-song, "Spent the Rent." It’s amusing filler of the "blandish' at the core" genre. "Easy for You" sounds like something Linda Ronstadt would do. Say no more.

"I Won’t Grow Up" proves that after keeping basically straight faces so far, the Fools couldn’t miss ending the album with a laugh. This is a cover of the Walt Disney song from Peter Pan. Somewhere back in his first grade I didn’t have any idea how good a pop song it would make.

In all, the Fools have produced an album which can’t help but get lots of FM commercial airplay. They’re growing up.

The Fools from Boston

Jon van Zelmont

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