Meat Puppets deliver guaranteed pleasure at Paradise

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just a bit beyond one's grasp. This is no sellout from the old sound of 1980's "Oat My Way," but it shows a lot more sophistication from some very competent musicians. Bassist Cris Kirkwood spent the entire first set running around the Paradise stage while his brother thrashed about on his guitar. The image stands in seeming contradiction to the sound of the music, but it was pretty easy to get over. The old roots are still present, just a different approach this time around.

The Puppets then did a couple of straight blues tunes and a song from one of their older releases. The crowd was appreciative, but it did not sound like anything really preferred the old to the new. The Meat Puppets have a talent for coming out on stage with something they want to do, but always pleasing the crowd.

For many bands, there seems to be an implicit understanding between performer and audience that the band will provide their trademark sounds and masterpieces, and the audience will respond in kind. If the Meat Puppets have any such understanding, they agree to give the audience a good time; they do not care less. What they are spending their time doing is performing for the audience. As Curt puts it, "We can play good, but that's secondary. We play possessed." That's a Meat Puppets show in one line.

Never mind what the new album sounds like -- it's good. But make a point of seeing this band live because that's where they really shine. Maybe that's what people mean when they say the Meat Puppets are more like the Grateful Dead these days. I would not worry. The show on Wednesday confirmed that it is often better to move around musically. With the Meat Puppets you can always be sure of something different, something enjoyable, and a strong dose of onstage frenzy to keep your blood flowing.