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LIVE REVIEWS

the Plain Janes, Taxpayer, Faces on Film, Aberdeen City
Middle East Upstairs
Cambridge, MA
August 25, 2005



Although they've only been together for six months and played a handful of shows, the Plain Janes clearly are no rookies. Former Sheila Divine bassist Jim Gilbert and his Plain Janes bandmates have attacked the scene with ferocity, showing that they're here to make an impact. Their sound demonstrates heavy Echo and the Bunnymen and the Cure influences. Lead singer Greg Britton's soaring vocals are forceful and

passionate. Their strong guitar-and-keyboard-driven rock lead down a path to the not-yet-forgotten Boston rock scene of the '90s. The band blended well to produce a set that was intense and passionate all the way through. They have some very catchy tunes and didn't feel the need to drop the tempo at any point. Going on first, the Plain Janes left a room of people wondering how their performance could be topped.

Faces on Film's sound set them apart from the beginning, but they seemed to be trying too hard to be different. The vocals were punctuated by random fits of screaming in the middle of every song, whether fast or slow. Their set seemed long and depressing, and their bass player was often overpowering. Although their intensity was unmistakable, their message might have come through more clearly without the piercing cries.

Taxpayer shifted back on track where the Plain Janes left off. Their tunes were catchy and were complemented by easy vocals and strong guitar sound. They were another example of Boston indie rock at its best. Their driving energy and desire were immediately evident. They were serious, yet fun, and emitted an emotional and dynamic presence.

Aberdeen City's set was a good fit for the evening's end. Their solid rock tunes were hard-hitting but still stirred the crowd's emotions. The veteran four-piece carried a blend of Radiohead and Interpol influences with a garage edge. While the set droned at times, they capped off the evening in their own unique way.

-Sharon Biggie



Photos by Ricardo de Lima

www.theplainjanes.com
www.facesonfilm.com
www.taxpayermusic.com
www.aberdeenmusic.com

Amusia, the Product
The Stata Center Amphitheater at MIT
Cambridge, MA
September 8, 2005

MIT's Stata Center is a polarizing piece of architecture. While some see the building as a look into the future, others regard it as a gross monument to ego. In the "back yard" of the Stata Center is a medium-sized amphitheater, the kind where Socrates might have hung out, except it's made out of bright orange brick and populated by electrical engineers. Instead of Greek philosophy, the smart kids were treated to a one-two punch of local rock, courtesy of MIT-based bands Amusia and the Product. Amusia took the stage/ground first, Ruth Peterson a confident and emotive singer upfront, flanked by the brothers Russell on drums and guitar, along with a new bassist. Matt Russell's lively performance behind his seemingly too-small kit powered Amusia's set. He was a ceaseless whirlwind of sticks, brass, and faces (he likes to sing along). A lilting mix of Sarah McLachlan and Natalie Merchant, Peterson wastes no breath; every available bit of lung power is employed for a strong and true tone. The drumming and vocals take center stage, masking the mid-'90s generic alt-rock guitar strumming that infiltrates almost every song. Peterson's confidence permeated the band, providing a strong and solid set in which the band won over new fans with their smooth brand of adult-alternative music.

Upon arrival, the Product quickly made it known that their trip was a different one from the pleasantly heady Amusia sound. It began the moment that Grant Kristofek opened up his guitar case and produced a bright red BC Rich guitar formed in the indelible shape of *metal*. Frontman/bassist Dan Paluska joined him on stage in the requisite western-style shirt and skinny-guy jeans, while behind them sat drummer Clark Kemp, who smiled almost apologetically when he wasn't mercilessly bashing the drum kit into submission. The Product mixed their own brand of old-school rap with Black Sabbath-flavored guitar riffs. Paluska seemed to have earnestly worked on his moves. Once the beats began, he adopted the goofiest frontman stance the local rock scene has witnessed in a while, bowing his legs as if riding a horse, prancing and mincing around on the toes of his sneakers like a post-punk Pinocchio on marionette strings, and punctuating the big musical hits with some rather impressive jumps. Kristofek's creative work on the guitar utilized some interesting synth-effect pedals as well as a 9-volt battery as a string-bow, perhaps as a nod to Harvard University's own Tom Morello, who uses Allen wrenches to similar effect. The Product could be described as post-docs playing high school rock, but they are most definitely the real thing. The stringy guitar riffing, bass slapping, and drum pounding stand proudly singular as the Stata Center itself. Whether singing about drunken neighbors, mysterious electronics, or even doing their own paraphrased version of "Scarborough Fair," the result was a fine evening for the MIT audience, even worth sitting on those damned orange bricks for two-plus hours.

-C.D. Di Guardia

Photos by Jeff Breeze
www.amusia.com
www.plainfront.com

Swale, Opus
Burlington, VT
September 16, 2005

As the ship of Friday night closed within two hours of the iceberg of Saturday, the crowd at Opus showed no sign of slowing down. The freshmen -class of nightclubbers was heavily represented. The young men had thick mop tops and wore untucked fresh-pressed button-ups and crisp pants, some with Buddy Holly-esque glasses, and the girls made dressing informally a veritable competition.

The three-year-old Burlington-based band, Swale, took the stage at 10:30PM after gifted piano player Marie Claire. Owing to the size of the stage, the band brought a scaled-down version of their set. Eric Olsen (guitar) had a Fender Tweed half stack