



Pat Fish, either of the Jazz Butcher or *the* Jazz Butcher, entertained a near sellout crowd at Dinwoodie last Saturday.

Butcher in creative trouble

The Jazz Butcher
Dinwoodie Lounge
Saturday, November 25, 1989

review by Greg Pohl

The Jazz Butcher is sort of a "he" and sort of a "they". "He" is Pat Fish, a goofy sort of chap from Northampton, England, who never really expected to get famous. The "they" is because these days it's not entirely clear whether "The Jazz Butcher" refers to just Mr. Fish, or to his whole band.

The show on Saturday night didn't look like a sellout, but there were plenty of people having fun. People like the two rather "confused" individuals who fell into the speakers in rapid succession! Most of the crowd was a bit better-behaved than that, though.

The Jazz Butcher opened up with "New Invention", from their latest record, *Big Planet, Scary Planet*. The next half hour of the show was entirely made up of songs from this LP and the previous record, *Fishcoteque*. This newer material received polite applause, but the audience didn't get really excited until the band drifted into older territory, like "Big Saturday", and "Angels".

After the show, when I asked my friends, the consensus was "hmmmm..... yeah, it was ok." When pressed for details, they all seemed to agree that the older songs made the show. Songs like "Bicycle Kid" and "New Invention" were tight, but they didn't have that special something that oozed out of the earlier songs.

What we witnessed on Saturday night was basically a talent that is in serious creative trouble. It's not just the self-indulgent noodling about with tape loops that we've seen on the last two albums. Nor is it the ultra-tight rhythm section, which has given the butcher a calm foundation in exchange for the crazoid mania they used to have. I think the problem is that they've tried, quite unsuccessfully, to become more sophisticated. There's nothing wrong with progressing, but The Jazz Butcher seems to have moved from something they were good at, into a morass of directionless mediocrity.

There's nothing really wrong with songs like "Chickentown" and "Bad Dream Lover," but they just don't have that mix of wit and poignancy that older songs had. At one time,

the Jazz Butcher had something to say about going down to the pub, partying with a bunch of friends, getting drunk and silly, and using it all to disguise the fact that you're dying inside. From the naive clarity of "Party-time" to the wiggled-out "Devil is my Friend", their songs worked because they were sincere, and everyone could relate to them. But now the Jazz Butcher has grown up, travelled this big scary planet, and gotten swallowed by it. Perhaps they'll find some direction, but right now they've lost their roots, and can't find anything concrete to stand on.

Though it was a very tight set, the show just didn't have enough energy or substance. Longtime fans heard enough of their old faves to keep them happy, but newcomers curious about The Jazz Butcher probably were a bit underwhelmed. They would have been better off spending the \$13.25 on an

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earlier record, like *Bloody Nonsense* or *Distressed Gentlefolk*. Sure, everyone had fun, but Dinwoodie gets better shows for much less money.

People who didn't arrive in time for the warm-up band, Customade, didn't miss much. Far from being custom made, these guys seem hopelessly mired down in copycat pop music. At least half of their set seemed to be covers, but I wasn't entirely sure. It was difficult to tell where the Simple Minds and Split Enz songs ended and their own compositions began. As I watched them a word that kept coming to mind was "Clean". They were so squeaky clean that they removed all smudges of energy and emotion from their music. If they have any hopes of being more than a bar band, they'll have to loosen up a bit, and start expressing their own musical ideas.

Chalk Circle strictly Canadian

interview by Jim Knutsen

Sons and Daughters, you ain't getting much for free...

They see gold in your trees and gold in your people

They'll be panning for it in your water

This is what Chris Tait, lead singer of Chalk Circle, writes about when dealing with his concerns about free trade. This band is strictly Canadian, and lets us know it through their impressively figurative lyrics.

Chris Tait and the rest of Chalk Circle, Brad Hopkins (bass, vocals), Derrick Murphy (drums), and Tad Winklarz (keyboards, sax, vocals), are presently on a tour of western Canada to promote their new release, *As The Crow Flies*. The tour started in Regina and will move westward, finishing in Victoria in December. The band scheduled two stops in Edmonton. They have already played The Metro last Wednesday, and will be playing Dinwoodie Lounge December 1st.

Tait was not pleased with Chalk Circle's gig at The Metro. His displeasure resulted from the fact that 'guitar wars' hogged the stage most of the evening, and the band couldn't start playing until 12:15 am. He confessed his dissatisfaction politely, however, saying "Let's just put it this way, we're really looking forward to playing Dinwoodie."

Chalk Circle is not picky about the venues they play in. "We'll play anything with half-decent sound," Tait says. He also mentions that they are "used to playing clubs." Yet, recent tours with Crowded House and Rush have allowed them to expand the size of the venue as well as the size of the audience before which they perform.

Chalk Circle seized an opportunity to play in East Berlin for the East German Music Festival in February of this year. Tait and the rest of the band found this to be an enlighten-

ing experience. "It was incredible, very eye-opening," says Tait, "you arrive with all these prejudices and preconceived notions of how life is supposed to be in Eastern Block countries." Yet, he found that personalities still remain the same despite the philosophy behind the society.

After returning from Europe, Chalk Circle moved to the studio to start recording. They recorded in four different studios with their new management (Intrepid) and numerous recording guests. Accompanying Chalk Circle on the album are Jane Siberry (vocals in "Blue Heaven"), Moe Kauffman (sax on "Fairytale and Fiction", and "Lonely Street"), and Hugh Marsh (Violin on "Sons and Daughters").

At first listen, *As The Crow Flies* is ultra-diverse in tempo and style. Initially, you are confused with songs ranging in style from heavy New York rock in "As The Crow Flies," to heavy-fingered piano licks in "The Moral-ist," to the downtown groaner "Lonely Street," and finally to folk-rock gospel in "Sons and Daughters."

The album as a whole is intensely diverse with each song setting a completely different style, tempo, and sound. Tait insists this is a good development as "people are starting to realize that diversity is part of Chalk Circle's sound."

In addition, Tait hopes this record will provide "an opportunity to offer something original to the listeners." Indeed it will. The listener is forced to listen to each song separately, treating him/her to an entourage of insightful lyrics, strong and consistent vocals, faultlessly arranged music, and a message.

What the listener ends up with is an album in which each song has its own personality. It is fairly evident that this discontinuity is the desired intent. Tait explains, "We really

wanted to cater production to the song."

Thus far, Chalk Circle's has had best success with the cut "Sons and Daughters." This song is particularly effective for several reasons. The free-trade issue is an important one for Tait as it is inspired by a book called *If You Love This Country* (a collection of essays on this issue), specifically "The difference between Canadians and Americans," by John

Greg. As well, the gospel-like finale for the song removes electric instruments and emphasizes vocal power in order to take the song to a personal level, evoking that 'this issue affects you and me' feeling.

Ironically, Chalk Circle still await release of their album in the US. America is 50 per cent of the pop music market. "Ah well," reports Tait, "We're not in any hurry."



Chalk Circle will be playing Dinwoodie Friday, December 1, and they are *really* looking forward to it.