

# New sobriety adds to band's impressiveness

by Chris Wodskou

There are but a few things that occupy a more privileged place in my heart than The Replacements: my family, by dint of verifiable blood ties; my best friends; Woody Allen movies; The Leafs on a good night (and being a Replacements fan has more than a little in common with being a Leafs fan, especially if your favourite player happens to be Brad Marsh); oh, and let's say Red Baron beer.

This, therefore, will not be an unbiased review of The Replacements show at the Concert Hall a couple of Sundays back. Even if they had just played a tape *Tim* or *Pleased To Meet Me* and stood on stage scratching their butts I'd probably still call it the concert experience of a lifetime, so the fact that they rocked like fiends should lend a degree of credibility to the ravings that will follow.

The Replacements set up a bit of a challenge for themselves in acquiring

the services of the Goo Goo Dolls for the openers.

Buffalo's finest (I know, that does sound like a contradiction in terms), the Goo Goo Dolls immediately set high standards for volume, speed, and intensity with their tuneful buzz, spewing forth a formidable barrage of noise for a three-piece for a forty minute love-in with the stage antics of the bassist, who is clearly the best-looking rocker since, oh, Ozzy Osbourne. Rock demons in every sense of word, although just what they were singing about was anybody's guess.

The hint of professionalism which The Replacements bring to their live show in their current incarnation, though, was off-putting to many old guard fans, nostalgic for the old days when former guitarist Bob Stinson would abort a Kiss cover by passing out or throwing up on stage.

The Replacements are now, for better or for worse, a very different

band from the one that stumbled drunkenly, but brilliantly around the Canada Wonderland stage in front of Tom Petty a year and a half ago, and it's not just because drummer Chris Mars has been replaced by Steve Foley.

No longer content with being seen as the ringleader of a drunken bunch of loveable screwups, Paul Westerberg, it's achingly obvious, longs to be taken seriously and has forsaken the demon rum in exchange for serious attention in what seems to be a last gasp at trading in their critics' darling chips for a taste of mass acceptance.

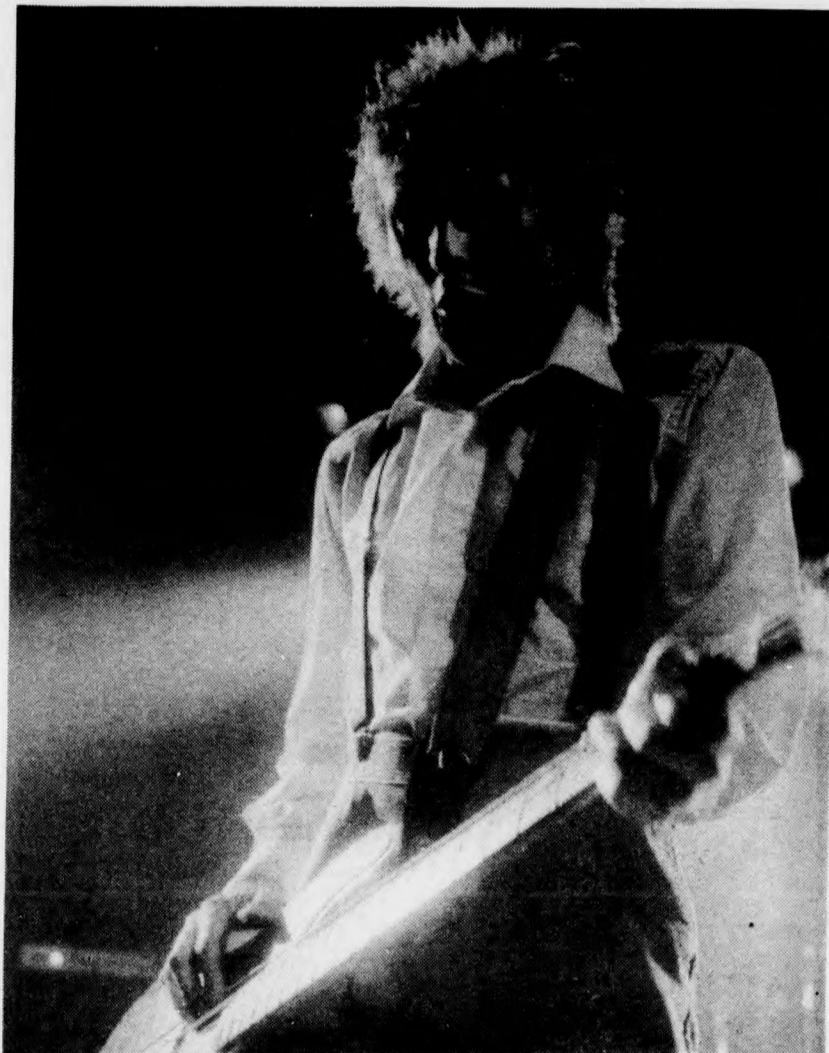
You can hardly blame Westerberg, even if you do miss that image of the eternal underdog, the kicked around, misunderstood, defiant band you love to love; after all, he is probably the most underrated songwriter of the past ten years, an understated, unassuming, yet articulate voice of teenage disaffection.

If anyone cared to listen through the thrash and howl of songs like *I.O.U.*, *Never Mind*, *Little Mascara*, *Bastards of the Young*, and *I Will Dare*, one would hear rhyming couplets brought to compact, precise perfection; pithy, telling narratives and anecdotes rivalling Billy Bragg for poignancy and economy; and evocative, audacious, and multi-layered wordplay that can make Elvis Costello sound almost awkward in comparison.

With mainstream critical accolades in the offing (Westerberg was just named Best Songwriter for 1990 by a moldy cabal of *Rolling Stone* critics), there now seems to be a sense that The Replacements have no more excuses if they blow it this time, no longer able to blame their woes upon being young, stupid, and rebellious (although a case could still be made for Tommy Stinson).

Thus, Westerberg is still in a state of perpetual in-betweenness; while he sings "One foot in the door, the other one in the gutter" in *I Don't Know*, he now finds the boardroom door open before him, but isn't sure whether or not to wipe his muddy shoes before venturing onto that plush carpet.

Not too many record company executives or neophyte fans would have been nonplussed by the number of heartstring-tugging ballads (*Swingin' Party*, *Here Comes a Regular*, *Skyway*, *Nightclub Jitters*) which prompted more than one wiseacre to hold a lighter aloft, but that in itself constituted a radical departure from past Replacements shows.



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**Bassist Tommy Stinson shows that The Replacements' reputation for being young and stupid rebels is still alive within his lean frame. Fortunately his antics were not enough to diminish the impressive showing given by these media-loved stars.**

The rest of the band would humor Westerberg's wistful, verbal mastery in the studio on the condition that they wouldn't do none of that prissy, weepy crap on stage, but now Westerberg seems determined to foreground the quality of his songwriting, to the point of enforcing a regimen of sobriety, sacrificing perhaps some of the wild spontaneity (i.e. would they finish the song or not) of previous shows.

But as if to allay any fears that they've gone soft and to pre-empt the inevitable cries of "Sell-out!", they burst out of the blocks with a fury, playing "I Don't Know", their roughest, grungiest moment of recent years, before launching into one of their most cherished chestnuts, "I Will Dare".

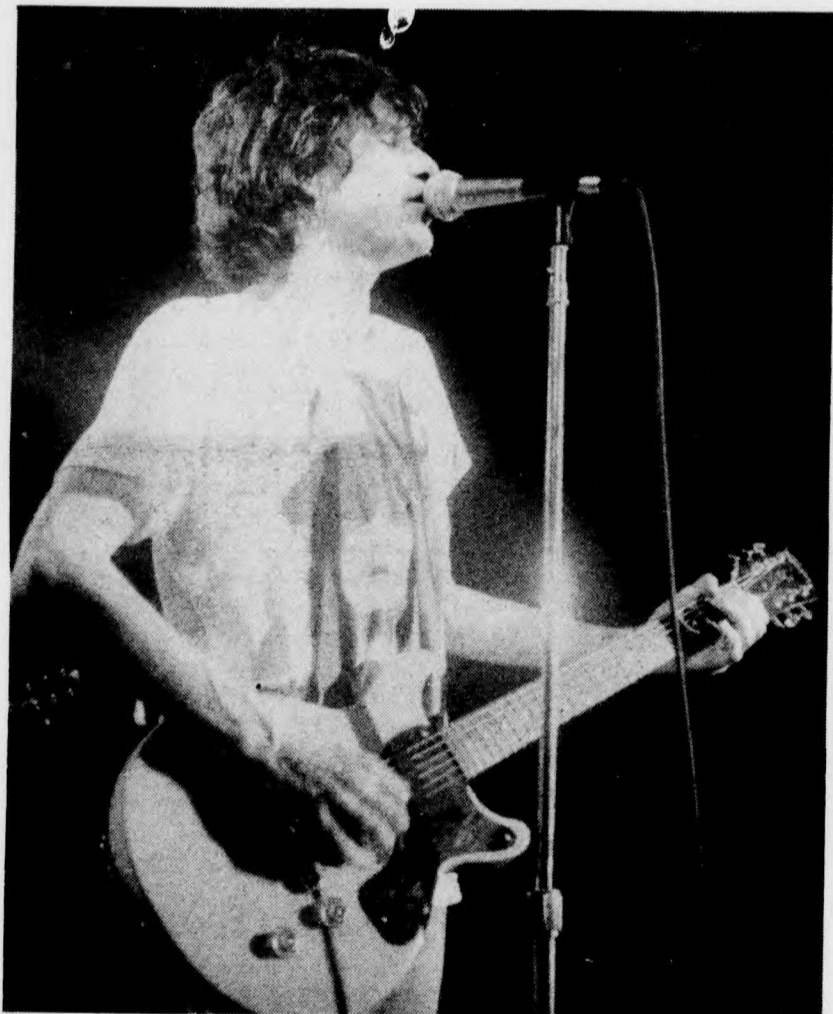
While tracks from their breakthrough albums, *Don't Tell A Soul* and *All Shook Down* were toughened up considerably and given an added dose of thunder, the songs from *Let*

*It Be*, *Tim*, and *Pleased To Meet Me*, arguably the three best rock albums of the 1980s, only made their newer material seem wan and insignificant, a faint echo of past glories.

Who could argue with the thrill of recognition at hearing the sublime opening chords of *Left of the Dial*, their paean to campus radio, the surprise appearance of *Color Me Impressed*, and the scream of vented frustration that explodes through *Bastards of the Young*?

But even that was nothing to compare with the tension-breaking moment that announced the raucous celebration of *Alex Chilton*, as great a rock homage as has ever been penned and the crowning moment of the show, an encore of the achingly spare and beautiful *Unsatisfied* which poured out Westerberg's soul for all to partake of.

Color me impressed, and consider me in love all over again.



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**Paul Westerberg, noted rock'n'roll demigod and leader of The Replacements, strums his stuff at the Concert Hall. The band's recent seriousness is fuelled by Westerberg's desire to shake their drunken image and become respected purveyors of rock music.**

# Charlatans transcend musical moniker with kicking show

by Chris Robinson

Let's finally bury the rotting carcass of the being conceived and brought into this world by the *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker* and named "Manchester Scene". It's crap.

The Charlatans are simply a band who have released an incredibly wonderful record and are quite adept at carrying their recorded magic over to the stage. Okay! The M-word is now forbidden!

It seems a long way from 300 people at the Horseshoe Tavern just a couple months ago to 1800 packed in the Concert Hall this past Sunday, but I guess it was inevitable, wasn't it?

The Charlatans have snuck up on the seemingly dormant Stone Roses and stolen their fire (last one to North America is a dirty rotten...).

Though they may not admit it themselves, as I found when talking to them before this gig, the Charla-

tans are now the fave raves of the U.K. press and will undoubtedly feel the backlash (as have Ian Brown's lads) if they do not work hard to maintain the momentum that they have thus far generated.

At this point, that momentum certainly isn't in any danger. The audience at this, the only Canadian date on the tour, was won over before the first "wah" of guitar.

Standing among the crowds near the front of the stage, I could feel the tension waiting to be released. Enter the Charlatans through the fog, heightening the tension with the first number "Imperial 109."

The build-up of the song was brilliant planning as it foreshadowed the orgasmic release "The Only One I Know". I really don't think enough can be said of that song. It has been so shrewdly crafted that every part of it. Vocals, guitar, organ, drums, bass are all so vital and so captivating,

and if it sounded completely natural, just the way it should be, as the crowd bounced as a collective unit to that hypnotic 1-drop drum beat.

This mention of the song's similarity to Deep Purple's "Hush" is nonsense. As the band said before the gig, "Hush" sounds like Deep Purple and "The Only One I Know" sounds like the Charlatans.

The Charlatans, pop stars, plying their craft while the lava lamp produces the psychedelic haze on the wall behind the lead singer Tim Burgess. This vision of youthful adrognity and frail sex object of the 90s gave his best Morrison/Morrissey routine, playing to the delight of his followers on the floor.

Is Tim a new rock god? I'm sure he believes so, but he had best temper his onstage antics lest they enter the realm of the foolish.

Mention must be made of the scorching versions of "Believe You

Me", "Sproston Green" and their first single "Indian Rope", all successfully sounding like the trippy classics that they are.

Unfortunately, though the band were well up to par in their performance, the sound man and acoustics (what acoustics?) of the Concert Hall at times, were not. This left such gems of songs as "White Shirt" and "Then" sounding muddied and distorted.

The all important Hammond organ of Rob Collins was either buried far too low in the mix or blaring beyond recognition. Subtlety is something that I think is incredibly important to pop music, and one cannot be subtle when one cannot be heard or when one is heard far too much. It was a disappointment not to hear the proper magic of the organ throughout the whole show.

Though it was good to hear three new songs, the set list did bypass,

"Everything Changed" and "You Can Talk to Me," two standouts from the Horseshoe gig back in October. Speaking of the Horseshoe... something strikes me as very different in this show.

I remember that Oct. 3 was the Charlatans' debut in North America and you could certainly tell at the time.

The band were visibly elated at the response they received that evening, as I sensed then that they did not quite expect the degree of approval with which they were met. At this show however, as I already mentioned, they were a success before a note was played and they knew it.

I wondered after the show, sitting at home, "Was this concert just a job for them, just another of the 16 dares on this tour? Then I thought, "Who cares!?", and threw on *Some Friendly*.