

ENTERTAINMENT

There's cheer for the ears in two Baxter reviews

Lightning zaps

by Gisèle Baxter

In February, you remember I introduced you to a local band aiming for success with their electronic-based rock music. Recently I had the opportunity to catch Lightning in concert at the Grafton St. Café and discovered that this band's show is definitely impressive — it has real potential.

Illuminating the small stage area were bright lights, which often changed colour or pulsed to the rhythms of the songs. Among the instruments were four synthesizers (two per keyboardist), including a Prophet-5, a beautiful machine which has been much discussed in the synth-music business. When Lightning took the stage, keyboardists Kurt Haughn and Anne White occupied the sides, with Don White (bass guitar) and Kirk Ross (drums) situated between them, while vocalist Carolyn Sandford had the forefront. Carolyn is a tall, striking woman with a mass of light brown curly hair and absolutely piercing eyes.

The material presented was vibrant and performed with a convincing electricity; after a few numbers, several members of the mostly young, enthusiastic audience dashed to the dance floor where they bobbed appreciatively through both sets. Lightning's brand of electronic music is performed with skills, enthusiasm, a marvellous sense of timing, and an infectious enjoyment of live performances. These musicians project a great deal of fun in being together onstage.

The songs performed were mostly original Lightning tunes and told, in sharp, intelligent, often witty lyrics, of life and love. The vocals belonged to Carolyn Sandford, with occasional, effective back-up work from Anne White. Carolyn is an amazing singer; she is vivacious, passionate, theatrical, and even comical. Saturday night, she danced and prowled about the stage, never betraying fatigue, as she sang in her strong appealing vibrant voice.

This is a band with a great sense of humour. Kurt Haughn provided circus music on the Prophet, as well as the themes from "Star Wars" and "Peter Gunn"; he introduced a cover of Gary Numan's "Airplane" as "an old Chet Atkins song — I bet you didn't know Chet Atkins has gone New Wave." The humour was only part of the act, and did not have to

cover for the material, as several outstanding numbers were performed. These included some wonderful rockers like "Stand Up", some passionate blues-based songs ("How Does It Feel" and "Never Let Me Go"), "Dying Twice", "Merry-Go-Round", a rivetting version of "Airplane", and a really sharp number called "Girls Talk" (NOT Elvis Costello's tune), which opened the first set and closed the second as one of two numbers done after very vocal requests for an encore.

With excellent keyboard lines and effects from Kurt and Anne, Kirk's driving percussion, Don's throbbing, effective bass, and Carolyn's vocals, Lightning presented its brilliant musical package confidently and energetically. For the first set, the band members wore striking outfits in black, white, or both; for the second set Carolyn and Anne chose more casual costumes.

Bill Blakeney and Andy Shipley from Acolyte Studios were there — Bill provided the lighting effects while Andy taped the show and played between sets music (mostly Brian Eno, Ultravox, and Peter Gabriel).

Some unfortunate technical problems, which resulted at times in the vocals not being as well-projected as they should have been, never deterred the band from giving its best effort. Everyone on hand had a great time, and I was very impressed. I hope to be interviewing a member of Lightning on CKDU very soon, and to play some of the music for you. This exuberant, exciting band has, with its electronic sound, its sights set firmly on the 1980s.

The Jam

These three young Englishmen have come a long way from the days when they acquired their band name by playing lunch-hour jam sessions at school. Incisive, cynical yet romantic, and musically wonderful, **Sound Affects** is easily one of the most essential releases of 1991.

The last album, **Setting Sons**, was a brilliant anti-war record, with notes on the decline and fall of the British Empire. Ranging from brash wit to symphonic loveliness, it could capture your heart even in the painful landscape of its vision. **Sound Affects** brings The Jam to maturity; it is more unified and the production is leaner. The three members of the band (Paul Weller — guitar; Bruce Foxton — bass; Rick Buckler — drums) may not have the precision and pro-



iciency of The Police, but in terms of lyrical strength, immediacy, compassion and conviction, they may only rank behind The Clash, among bands recording today.

The most obvious musical influence is still early to mid 1960s English dance pop, and "Start!" is a sharp reminder of early Beatles, but principal songwriter and spokesman Paul Weller would disagree that this band is only a mod revivalist unit. The Jam is a band for the 1980s.

Let a vast assembly be/And with great solemnity

Declare with measured words that ye

Are, as God has made ye, free...

No, Weller did not write that; Percy Bysshe Shelley did, and it is quoted on the inner sleeve. In a sense, this high Romanticism propels the songs, which tend to explore the corruption of all that is great and noble in the human spirit by social, economic and political

forces. **Sound Affects** is almost a plea for a new attempt, a rebuilding, a "Start!" as the first song insists over the sharp tugs of its mod-style guitar chords:

It's not important for you to know my name/Nor I to know yours

If we communicate for two minutes only/It will be enough!

Other notable songs include "Set the House Ablaze," with its effective whistled introduction and martial percussion, which tells the story of a friend who has enlisted, and generally criticizes indoctrination. The lyrics of "Dream Time" capture the frustration of nightmares, even if the "feeling's much too real to ever disappear." "Man in the Corner Shop" achieves great compassion even in its irony.

The centrepiece of **Sound Affects** is "That's Entertainment," which has a lovely, melodic acoustic guitar line under its tale of working-class life, and includes some of the starkest, yet most perceptive, even poetic imagery on the record. Its anger seethes just below the surface, and is so real.

Waking up at 6 a.m. on a cool warm morning —

Opening the window and breathing in petrol —

An amateur band rehearsing in a nearby yard —

Watching the tele and thinking about your holidays —

That's entertainment.

From the excellent, even surrealistic imagery of urban nights (vaguely reminiscent of Tubeway Army circa 1978/79 and some Clash songs), to perceptive scenes of day-to-day survival, the Jam and Vic Coppersmith-Heaven have produced a tough yet romantic, tuneful album. The brilliant single from last year, "Going Underground," definitely should have been included, but you can't have everything.

Paul Weller has been criticized, even by Joe Strummer of The Clash, for being too parochial in his outlook and subject matter. Yet if he chooses to write about English working-class neighbourhoods for several more records, England has found a wonderful and talented voice. It has produced a fine band in The Jam.