

X rates Xemplary but loses marks for balance

Not just another band from L.A., west coast trashmasters X polluted the Copa with their inimitable brand of garage-punk hysteria.

By AL "X" PATTERSON

Recent years have seen the letter "X" take its place in rock and roll mythology: X-Ray Spex, XTC, X Mal Deutschland, and just plain X. This past Tuesday, Toronto's most self-conscious recreation of Manhattan nightlife, The Copa, offered up X as proof that there's life after baseball.

After thrashing their way through the California Hardcore scene of the early 1980s (along with Black Flag, Dead Kennedys *et al*), X surfaced from the underground with their third album, *Under The Big Black Sun* on Elektra Records. (Their first

two, *Los Angeles* and *Wild Gift*, had been for the independent Slash label.) Their fourth release, *More Fun In the New World*, as well as the latest *Ain't Love Grand*, are also on Elektra, and though the concert featured songs from all five LPs, it was apparent that the band wanted desperately to push the new one. This is unfortunate, because although anything by X is worth a listen, *Ain't Love Grand* is the least musically interesting of the bunch, and seems calculated to win them a wider audience.

This is due, no doubt, to their abandonment of their long-time producer and mentor, ex-Door player Ray Manzarek, in favour of the German Michal Wagener, knob-twiddler for Teutonic rivetheads Scorpions and Accept. Herr Wagener has not succeeded in turning X into headbangers' heroes, but he has smoothed out some of their quirkiness and originality, and for this he should be buried alive with nothing but Go-Go's demo tapes for entertainment.

On Tuesday night, however, some



Billy Zoom: guitars, peroxide. Exene Cervenka: lead vocals (when audible), free-form poetry, cheesecake. John Doe: bass, vocals, cheap sunglasses. D.J. Bonebrake: Drums, poor spelling.

of that Wagenerian slickness would still have been preferable to the band's live sound, which consisted almost exclusively of the crashing chords of Billy Zoom's guitar. Now, this guitar—a glittering silver Gretsch—is a fine instrument, and Mr. Zoom played it with authority. But when it is mixed so loud that you wonder if the singers' mikes are plugged in, it is an instrument that doesn't know its place.

John Doe's bass could occasionally be detected filling in the holes left in the space by the chordal onslaught, but his vocals—and more importantly, those of lead singer Exene Cervenka—were nowhere to be found. At the end of the first song, fans pressed close to the stage screaming, "Exene, we can't hear you!" When the second song showed no improvement, the lovely and talented Cervenka (stunning in a basic

little black plastic dress with matching tattoos) left the stage to talk to the sound crew about her AWOL voice. No luck, though, as the singers continued to be entirely drowned out for the rest of the 90-minute set.

The result was a performance that was less of a concert than a lesson in Basic Guitar Chords; useful for aspiring axe-grinders, but a tad pricey, with a \$15 cover and \$2.60 beers. The crowd now knows the fingering for such X classics as "Blue Spark," "The Hungry Wolf" and "The New World," which bassman John Doe (as anonymous as his name behind cheap sunglasses) dedicated to the Chrysler workers.

Although the sound was not good, it was cranked up well past the pain threshold, which for many fans is all that matters. Loud enough to keep the ears ringing for two days after the show. Drummer D.J. Bonebrake

(sic) assaulted the audience by flailing his sticks with manical intensity, and took no solos.

Despite the pleas between songs from the diehards at the front, many in the audience seemed unperturbed by the fact that the band lost its voice somewhere between LA and here. That they would never hear Exene's delightfully twisted lyrics ("The devil drives a Buick/He sits inside & eats his lunch... True love is the devil's crowbar" etc.) seemed not to bother them. Instead, some used the occasion to bone up on their body-checking technique, as close-cropped slamdancers thrashed into the unwary in that space between the tables which The Copa calls the dance floor. This reaffirmed the only enduring dress code for rock concerts: never wear anything that might be ruined by cigarettes, airborne ale, or bovver boots.

UB40 sells out for cash; NMA a "welcome relief"

By IAN PEDLEY

UB40
Little Baggarriddim

UB40's older fans will probably find their latest effort, *Little Baggarriddim*, quite a disappointment. As the title suggests, this mini-album is a grab-bag of songs. Unfortunately, all of them could be rejects from their recent albums.

From "Don't Break My Heart," a slow-moving plea to a lover, to "Hip Hop Lyrical Robot," a generic rap, UB40 seems to have experimented with only the kinds of reggae designed to catch an AM disc jockey's ear. Gone are the driving rhythms; in their place is an overblown attempt at commercial success.

Ironically, the only tune on the EP that succeeds in any way at all was not written by the band, but is a remake of the 1965 hit "I Got You Babe," penned by Sonny and Cher. UB40's version features Chrissie Hynde (of The Pretenders) teaming up with UB40 lead vocalist Ali Campbell to produce a very fresh-sounding, upbeat interpretation of the teeny-bop classic. It should guarantee them a spot on *Solid Gold*, which seems to be what they want.

It is unfortunate that UB40, one of the most respected of the new wave of reggae bands, must sacrifice some of their art for airplay.

New Model Army
No Rest for the Wicked
(Capitol Records)

The New Model Army, a name taken from Cromwell's shock troopers in the British civil war, is a welcome relief for those who feel that music

has lost much of its raw edge. With vocals very similar to Paul Weller, ex-Jam vocalist, and lyrical content reminiscent of the political anger of the Clash, this debut album can be compared to any of the dominating punk bands of the late '70s and still hold its own.

New Model Army's sound is not cluttered with the addition of electronic gimmicks or too many overdubs. The result is a very crisp studio mix with the emphasis directed more to the ear than the hips. *No Rest for the Wicked* is a promising debut for this energetic band. If "Slade the Leveller" keeps penning tunes, The New Model Army may just thrash its way into musical prominence.



VERREE SCAREE!! Album cover for New Model Army's refreshingly raw new record.

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