

BETTIE SERVEERT

LONDON CLAPHAM GRAND

THIS IS the most marvellous sound! And they're Dutch into the bargain, which means they're as uncool and mysterious as hell. In these days of very few surprises, Bettie Serveert are like someone creeping up behind you and letting off a cap gun into the pavement.

Supporting Throwing Muses, Bettie Serveert go on at five past eight, and have completely wiped the floor with me by 8.30. It's ironic, I guess, that they should emerge in the same week as I have to slag The Sundays' LP, but this BS gig reminded me of the thrill of seeing The Sundays early on, only in front of more people.

Soundwise there are no similarities, but they set the pulse racing in the same way,

seeking our extremes of emotion, with a time-honoured nod towards writing that big tearjerker. Tonight's set – as with the forthcoming LP 'Palomine' – is bold and rocky, while retaining a majestic feel to the rhythms.

There's even one husky moment, where they conjure up visions of a latter-day Pretenders, without all the leather gear. Certainly they could capture the mood of 'Brass In Pocket', while stretching the sound out by miles. There's an obvious American undercurrent here, running through the casual laid-back build-ups to songs like 'Kid's Alright' – but there's an English-style innocence too.

No wonder 4AD/Guernica are out in force! BS are possibly the most ungainly looking foursome of the year – but then again, what the Europeans know about cool could be

written on the back of a new 10p coin. Guitarist Peter Visser looks like Adrian Edmondson crossed with Michael Foot. Imagine!

While the songs sweep round your head, it's worth hammering home that the singer with the unsexy name, Carol Van Dijk, has a glorious, enveloping voice that has a consistent moving quality to it. It performs little miracles of humanity and then goes off to save the world.

Final note: Bettie Serveert is translated as Betty Serves, in honour of '70s tennis player Betty Stove. So there's some marvellous reasoning going on behind the scenes as well.

If you take my advice you'll Virginia Wade in without delay.

Steve Lamacq