

BELLY CRANES HOBOKEN MAXWELLS

CRANES ARE decidedly half-baked, a bunch of nitwit hicks living in denial of the fact that the goth wars ended in humiliating defeat years ago. Clueless and insular, they are over-indulgent, sickly infants – the disastrous result of years of inbreeding of the Banshees/Cocteau's ethereal girl lineage.

It looks like Jeremy and Pippa's art school chum Seth has been burning the midnight oil down in the media lab, because the Cranes' anaemic spasms are tonight augmented by a back projection of some *pretty scary* images in a mutant collage of German expressionist shadowplay, oppressive geometric slabs, muddy nightmare swirls and Rorchsach blotches. Heavy stuff indeed, but Allison Shaw's pipsqueak pipes are an instrument of torture more vile than any of the bed-wetting fodder on the wall behind her.

She imbues her enervating slow puncture of a voice with the presence a satantic movie tot who'll wake you up in the dead of night to menace your spleen with a Black And Decker. Thankfully, the band's man-machine precision and daunting volume shake this tiny tavern to its rafters.

Tired of playing second fiddle in the Throwing Muses, Tanya Donnelly opens her own account with Belly, a solar-powered vehicle for her endless sensitivities. Unfortunately, she suffers from the appalling affliction that seems to strike young American women of a certain class: the urge to don second-hand print dresses and impose endless folky meanderings on the doe-eyed, sexless boys in the front rows. Donnelly's three male sidekicks buttress her heartfelt keening with intricate arrangements, barely staving off the velvet-looned spectre of mid-'70s medievalism with the merest hint of residual post-punk energy.

"Have you ever had someone you would die for?" implores Donnelly. I don't know about that, but after half an hour of Belly, my guts were shrieking for a pint.

Steven Daly