

# THE STARLIGHT EXPRESS



PICTURE: ANDY WILLISHER

## BELLY

### LONDON COVENT GARDEN ROUGH TRADE SHOP

BLINK AND you miss them. Whoa! That was Belly, glinting at us briefly but brilliantly on a whistle-stop promotional visit to the capital, pausing only to illuminate *The Word* and make that lunchtime browse through the local platter outlet's New York Avant-Noise (Imports) section somewhat more rewarding than usual. As the only other tummy-touting pop icon of recent years once remarked — starlight, star bright, make everything alright . . .

"Leslie says this is like a party where you don't know anyone," remarks Tanya Donelly, the pole star in this particular version of heaven, as she gazes out at the tightly packed ranks of those fortunate enough to have learnt of this unannounced shopping soundtrack sesh.

Yer friendly indie pub bunker begins to look like the average enormodome when the mixing desk is balanced on a pile of fanzines, the great unwashed are no more than a hearty sneeze away from seriously damaging the health of the band and the tour manager gets a phone call midway through the set. And, as ever during these now regular events, some folk insist on intently poring over the racks as if nothing untoward is going on.

But even the uncommitted have to admit that a little navel contemplation is compulsory on this occasion. With nary a glance at the special offer CDs stacked temptingly near her line of vision, Tanya nods the troops through a drop deadly five song Greatest Hits revue. Attention set-list sadoes: 'Angel', 'Gepetto', 'Slow Dog', 'Feed The Tree', 'Dusted'. Jeez. And hey, how can she smile and sing and chew gum all at the same time?! A pair of dotting Donelly lookalikes stare on, enraptured.

In such a concentrated dose, Belly are stunning. Even allowing for the experience of its main protagonists, this is remarkably assured stuff, as anyone following their progress last year will have noted. They will also recall how the arrival from California of tour-shy ex-Throwing Muse Leslie Langston coincided with the major leap ahead in cohesion, and so her continued presence is a happy thing — although one not destined for permanence; the fourth (!) Belly bassist will be unveiled on next month's full tour.

A minute or so past 1.15pm and that's that. "Go eat lunch!" beams Tanya. The fetching but rather selfish notion that all gigs ought to be like this — intimate, no crap songs and with plenty of visual distractions if necessary — has to be quashed, no matter how reluctantly. Because everyone deserves to catch a glimpse of this star.

Keith Cameron

**Tanya Donelly radiates heavenly energy right in the middle of the Grunge Imports section**