



**Black Francis (Bacon?) cackles maniacally before hitching his hook to the big bucks U2 enormo-wagon**

# RATTLE AND . . . TUM!

## PIXIES NEW YORK THE RITZ

"HEY! NEIL Young's playing next weekend! Oh, you're going to see the Pixies? Yeah, sure I heard of the Pixies. Whaddya think I am? Some kinda buttonhead?" Jesus, it's a miracle! The taxi driver's heard of the Pixies. This is not normal. In the corpulent, corporate, nose-jobs-for-the-pretty-boys United States Of Metallica, the Pixies are still a crocodile in the sewers of superstardom. Nirvana's f—— you dynamism may have made a few executive decision-making heads spin round, but the rule book for making it into the big rock league hasn't been re-written.

The Pixies' not entirely sold out night in the medium-sized Ritz is their last headline date before they sling their grappling irons on to the U2 enormo-tour. They're supporting U2, and not the other way round because they broke the golden rawk 'n' roll rules: 1) They did not kiss ass at MTV; 2) None of them have haircuts like Michael Bolton; 3) In a past life Bono was General Custer whereas Black Francis was WC Fields. This, plus their Euro-centric touring habits, made them, in U(nit) S(hifting) terms, 'difficult'.

So, a tour with U2 and a scheduled appearance on the US Wogan-for-the-non-senile *David Letterman Show* doing 'Trompe Le Monde' the night after the Ritz looked like this was the Pixies going for the showbiz heartland at last. I thought Black Francis would come on in a Michael Bolton wig, waving a flag. Wrong.

Ten minutes in and confusion reigns. Four Pixie-like waxworks grind out stop-start instrumental fragments of songs like they're doing a crushed medley of old bits they're bored with. It's a shaky beginning, not helped by the fact that Black Francis is staring off stage like he's seen a UFO in the wings. Even when they hit some sort of a stride with 'Stormy Weather' it's still a limping, sluggish stride.

For the first half of the show they seem wilfully intent on delivering misshapen, hunchbacked versions. The guitars fall silent in odd places or Black Francis' falsetto gets steamrollered by a dirge working of 'All Over The World'. It's as if they're pitching at an

imaginary Noo Yoik noise snob mentality, like they're proving to the ageing college graduate geeks in glasses who are standing at the back of the hall, that linking up with U2 doesn't mean easy rabble-rousing thrills. And with the raw drive of the songs muzzled, the Pixies are a drab spectacle. Kim at least smiles occasionally, but otherwise they are two technicians and a barking torture mask. All pain and no release.

Then something clicks into place. The white lights are snapped on and a Nazi-toned shout of "*I had me a vislon*" opens the floodgates for a run of hard, focused 'Trompe Le Monde' songs. Maybe they're just tired of the older songs. Maybe 'Subbaculture', 'Palace Of The Brine' and 'Bird Dream Of The Olympus Mons' are just richer pickings. For sure, they come alive, with the Jesus And Mary Chain's 'Head On' sounding like Sonic Youth doing Generation X, 'Motorway To Roswell' shaping up like Pere Ubu doing The Beach Boys and 'Planet Of Sound' impersonating AC/DC almost too well.

Legs and arms are flying past Black Francis as sneakered-up rawk dorks roll on top of each other (stage-diving is outlawed in NY unless in a brown paper bag) and the fat, frat-house oldsters in sensible shoes start letting out cries of "Yeeeeeeargh!" and "Awwwright!" like they're watching a 'proper' rock group, or the Superbowl. Momentarily, just to show they could do it, ass was given a kicking.

Black Francis is nobody's buttonhead and, on the brink of the Grand Canyon of big bucks touring, it's probably just a Pixie survival instinct that came up with half a show of stumbling, teasing and half of visceral rocking out. They cheated no-one, pulling out acoustic-based encores of 'Holiday Song' and 'Debaser', but at the same time threw enough clattering spanners into the works to keep MTV execs thanking the Lord for Michael Bolton.

When Black Francis screams out the "*You are the son of a mother f——er*" line from 'Nimrod's Son' in a voice like a cat being sodomised, and then collapses into serial killer cackling, you know that Pixies just don't belong on the *David Letterman Show*. And that's a good enough reason to keep the faith.

**Roger Morton**