

BIG PAPA GIRL ROCKERS

THROWING MUSES

PORTSMOUTH POLYTECHNIC

CABBAGE PATCH kids in appearance only, Throwing Muses are grown-ups who play living and breathing rock. Yes, they are three-quarters female, but equally free from boiler-suited collective clichés as they are from the macho stagnation that afflicts male rockers.

First night nerves are impaled on the fiery folk-funk of 'Fall Down', bulldozing all assumptions that intelligent rock must be static and cerebral. Splashed across organic hip-hop drums like some tribal rap religion, cave-painting lyrics whisper about anal retentives leading dimly-lit lives. The crowd vote with their feet, but hearts and minds soon follow.

With the ice not just broken but blowtorched into vapour, nothing can stop the hypnotically grinding 'Take'. A dependent woman's drudgery and insecurity is reproduced through driving bass and pleading guitar, never breaking free from monotonous circular motion. Underneath the scrubbed surface lies something off-key and off-colour, a quietly despairing skeleton in the kitchen cupboard.

But even this, probably the most clear and direct of Muses statements, is no sloganeering feminist anthem. That would be too simple and dishonest: deciding on definition when exploration is the real objective. Duality and detached interpretation are invited by every tune, especially tonight since the subtleties and open-ended e.e.cummings-and-goings of their lyrics are buried beneath rock gig routine.

'The Devil's Roof' erupts like an acoustic Wonderstuff – spiky guitar explosions grafted onto roaring dance rhythms – before ushering in a temporary break from the excellent 'Hunkpapa' album. The band peel back the skins of time and tradition to uncover their (and our) past: raw rockabilly played at breakneck speed, robotic chants and cuckoo cries interlocking like the insides of a clock, psyched-out mantras building into high-voltage Pixies guitar slides. Stripped-down, scary skin-and-bone rock.

Nothing tonight can match the towering vitality of 'Dragonhead', a richly layered organism evolving from multi-melodic electrical storms into a hillbilly hymn, which in turn mutates into a wistfully waltzing fairground ride.

As the '90s loom, very few bands are doing anything new with rock itself. Throwing Muses – along with the Sugarcubes and Pixies – create music stripped of references to the past, or indeed to anything. Go and hear them.

Stephen Dalton *Hunky Kristen*

