

EARS TO THE THROWN

THROWING MUSES ANASTASIA SCREAMED EDINBURGH CALTON STUDIOS

"This date/This war criminal is/This date is brutal, it/It wants red so I got red shoes/'Cause red becomes you..." ('Red Shoes')

NOT MANY pen ambiguous, intense love/hate songs with imagery gone askew quite like Kristin Hersh. In this great city of great solitude devastated by Aids, where the Nationalist revolution has been permanently delayed, her twisted, dislocated vignettes take on frightening new meanings.

While the charged-up group spin a sinewy web around her startling voice, she doesn't dance *per se*, just moves to and fro within a confined circle, shifts her head from side to side and delicately sways. The combination of this wordless communication and the information being imparted dissuades the listener from having an out-of-body experience, instead you think about dead bodies piled up in mounds and life dealing you several bad cards at a turn. Frightening.

"Garbage piled up to the ceiling/Ashttrays shaped like asses/All this money and a golden thing/Hell, I Got/You golden thing." ('Golden Thing')

'Golden Thing' is representative of the overhauled, streamlined Throwing Muses, who are riveting to watch tonight. With its laidback Bo Diddley-derived groove and restrained guitar interjections, it shows a group growing up in private and becoming more conventional as time goes on. After a two-hour hiatus, it was imperative that the Muses wouldn't retread old ground and they've somehow become more open, more welcoming; where they'd formerly gouge your eyes out, now they introduce poison into your system gradually. The end effects are the same, but this time larger numbers are caught under the stinging spell, enough to transform Calton Studios into a steaming sweatpit with highly reduced visibility.

Ask Kristin Hersh if 'The Real Ramona' LP was written as a result of personal experiences so overpowering she couldn't think of anything else and she'll reply: "The songs are so personal they're beyond personal experience. Not really my experiences, but experiences out there. It seems more like ghosts than anything else."

Pursue this line of questioning further by wondering if being onstage is an exorcism for her, a way to heal wounds and repair a scarred and damaged psyche, and she giggles: "It doesn't seem cathartic to me. It seems like I turn into the songs for a while, like being possessed, more than releasing anything

of my own." She then admits to assuming different personas to suit the characters in each song; the spurned lover on 'Say Goodbye', the reluctant star on 'Graffiti', and God knows what on 'Two Step'.

Talking to Kristin, you realise she doesn't worry about things like how much more commercially viable Throwing Muses are now. Rather, she's scared that they might get swallowed up whole in the rigmarole of touring, recording and making videos while those with vested interests try to interfere as much as possible.

WE USUALLY associate Nashville, Tennessee with Country music, conservatism and stale Budweiser, yet it's also responsible for Anastasia Screamed, who are disturbingly off-kilter. Anyone who gets drunk, drops acid, drives from Boston to New York City, and then writes a song about the car because "it sucked", has been in the desert-of-the-mind too long.

Sporting a singer who needs to be put out of his misery and pulverising with start-stop rhythms, Anastasia Screamed are not easy to pin down. Not that they lack antecedents, just that if you play your favourite songs backwards, take them apart and piece them back together in the wrong order, then add guitar grunge, the sprawling result might resemble 'Disintegrations', the closest they come to normality. Sometimes it might seem like all those chord changes and cymbal splashes are there to disorientate, gratuitously weird, but you only have to take in the plaintive moaning, groaning and yelping of the singer to realise they just can't help it...

In the flesh, Anastasia Screamed are much more abrasive than their attractive vinyl output would've prepared us for. There are echoes of hardcore and a less sinister, more lumpen rock in their four-minute dissertations, but it's the subtler moments that really count. '15 Seconds Or five Days' apparently written on the day war broke out, is a brooding ugly cousin of prime-time Doors without the silly mystical poet shtick. And 'Beautiful' raises sweat on your earlobes with a cluster of suspended guitar notes squabbling amongst each other before exploding into a fierce mid-section. It's quite heartening to realise that free-form structures (intertwined with something definite) are not consigned to the past. Anastasia Screamed baffle us completely in the nicest way possible; they stand up for the difficult side of things without being overtly intellectual in a time of gross simplicity.

I FIND myself entranced, nothing less than spellbound by Throwing Muses' spirited performance. They're more assured, more in control, less likely to wig out and stray



Onewofreefour... Kristin of The Ramonas

across unrelated tangents than they used to be, despite palpable first-night nerves and the odd cock-up. If anything, there should've been more mistakes and accidents, but how can you argue with something this far on a roll, using mechanical precision but still rooted in the (un)natural, the unenhanced?

What makes Throwing Muses this special is that even when detached, the listener can still gain maximum enjoyment. When you take in a movie, if you identify with the characters and find yourself engrossed, you could drown in melodrama. When you observe the cinematic expanse of 'Two Step', shackled to dubby drums, with immensely sad guitars and a walking bassline in the distance, you're drawn in but can't identify. You don't suddenly want to become a player: the story is just there to be taken in, not dissected, not applied to your own peculiar circumstances.

There are many moods to savour; hysteria, menace, accusatory mode, memory-loss, elation, undiluted anger... And, even though Tanya Donnelly's songs offer a more populist girl-group slant initially - something to do with her breathy tone - nasty ideas lurk beneath the still surfaces of 'Dragonhead', the soothing 'Honeychain' and the subtly harmonic 'Not Too Soon'. Also, the drum/bass axis is not weighed down by absurd, limited indie conventions, having been blessed with diversity and range, surprising us at each turn until the final, near-celebratory 'Hook In Her Head'.

"I brought this ball and chain for you/Don't you wear it/Say



Life's a Screamed

goodbye/Kick her head kick her down" ('Say Goodbye')

The sucker punch comes with 'Say Goodbye' which is pure naked emotion stretched out on a wire, Kristin Hersh fighting her demons while the adrenalin rush of giddy sound sends sparks flying. If you've always written Throwing Muses off as abstract and

insular and ignored the slight Country tinge to their stuff - falling quite short of yodels - then 'Cottonmouth' will make you rethink at least twice. The choice is there to be made: you can stay firmly rooted in the mundane or you can let loose, escape earthly trappings. Throwing Muses still soar.

Dele Fadele



Tanya: just like 'Honeychain'