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PORTAGE & MAIN / REDBIRD / TWIN RIVER

March 9 · The Media Club

Standing outside in the wet, I ran a hand through my loose misgivings and entered the Media Club with a cool head. Where tangled beards and loose ink are used as emblems by both artist and audience, deviating from such a uniform can cause some unwanted attention.

Standing on the outside looking in, I watched as the harmonies of Twin River's Courtney Ewan and Andy Bishop, backed by Dustin Bromley and Malcolm Jack, played "Can't Keep This Alive." They unified the crowd and invited me into the gathering. Twin River's blend of folk alternative rock, lead by the powerfully gentle voice of Ewan, prepped the audience for the evening to come. On this Friday night, the kickoff for Redbird and Portage & Main's cross-Canada tour, the union between friend and stranger was bridged.

Alongside John Sponarski, the concurrent front man of Portage & Main, as well as Ben Appeheimer (bass) and Graham Selr (drums), Redbird's Savannah Leigh Wellman's unmistakable seductiveness consigned the crowd into a prolonged frenzy. The eight months since Redbird's release of their EP *We're All Friends and Lovers Until it Falls Apart* allowed their live resonance to develop a fervency we don't hear on the album.

Exemplified in their newly issued track, "The Tower," the band that already (quoted from their website) "pulls from a slew of sonic inspirations," conducted the club's tenor to their choosing. Largely playing

material publicly released over the last year, their set included a few new songs, such as "I Fall Again," and "Roll Me Over." With their meticulous riffs, conducted by Wellman's sweeping vocals, every song resounded as a rock 'n' roll adage, fully willing and capable of sending the horde into a full on swing.

Taking their cue, Portage & Main aligned themselves behind the now central Sponarski, and his partner in front, Harold Donnelly. Without so much as a moment of conscious reconfiguration, Portage & Main began heaving out sunburned southern rock, fueling the crowd with showers of spittle, and bringing the audience within an inch of their vocal chords. Feeding off each other's defining voices, Donnelly's burly features and booming beard were subverted by his angelic voice. And with Sponarski's strong recital and striking dominance on stage, it was clear that he was more than just a role player alongside either Donnelly or Wellman.

Slowing down the pace, Portage & Main invited Wellman on stage to perform backup vocals for their song "Rocky Mountain Wanderer," lulling the crowd into peaceful sway. But before long, they revved up their engines, and busted out a new track "Sweet Darling," as well as the crowd-pleaser, "Carolina." With their national tour officially underway, this musical union between Redbird and Portage & Main is distinctly appropriate. Looking further than their intersecting musicianship, each group has a dominion over their audience that ultimately works together. Redbird establishes the groundwork that

Portage & Main is more than happy to parade upon.

Amid the remnants of the show, we said our anonymous farewells to the three bands we had come to see. Although I was far from knowing those crammed into the Media Club that Friday night, each of us parted with the same thought in mind: so long and goodbye.

—Sam Hawkins

BLIND HORSES / BEAMMS / 80(SUN)

March 11 · The Electric Owl

Jonathan Sherk of 80(sun) radiated a thunderous wall of white noise as he sat equably on the stage floor behind his laptop. As the caustic sound began to corrode the place just behind the eyes, an oscillating pulse began to tame the blinding white and carry it in gentle transition to an organic and disorienting atmosphere. The surrounding layers were strangely familiar, but altered; like memories from a dream. Percussive clicks resembling pebbles against slate peppered the dreamy melodies that floated atop an almost tangible blood-trembling bass. As abruptly as he began, the laptop was closed and a "thank you" signaled the end of his set.

BEAMSS, a music project consisting of Sam Beatch and Sebastian Davidson hovered over their equipment like bobbing birds and displayed their unique brand of dreamy minimal-house. Contrasting with 80(sun), BEAMSS' dense atmosphere rested on a more structured and gripping percussion. Instead of getting lost in the music you were gently lead through the parts, as they introduced warm melodic swells atop dark

rumbling bass that escalated with a steam generated intensity and dissipate like the rushing of a passing train, exemplified in the banger tracks: "Dirrd up" and "House Juno Eventide".

The tone was paradoxical, both eerie and pleasant and somewhat humorous in its enveloping rich atmosphere, consisting of raw and sharp metallic tones that would dissolve into a sound that resembled chattering robots. In their wake was left the hopeful shouting of "Encore!" from the elated and energetic crowd.

Blind Horses continued the atmospheric thread and built their set around stark juxtaposing elements, from the walking technical bass and rhythm sections of Jack and Will Macdonald, to the sharp choppy foundations of Peki Hajdukovic's supporting guitar. These parts were largely tied together by the honey-dripping voice of lead singer, Danny Majer's heavily manipulated guitar, which would support and influence the individually awkward sections towards intensity. Such songs as "Veils" or "Hands, Ghost" would start small and simple, beginning with a steady, raw and rhythmic strum from Peki, or ribbons of harmonizing a cappella falsetto. The momentum built with glossy, prattling seabird-toned guitar riffs that weaved through the elements and wound them tightly into crescendo. The songs rose and fell like the rolling swells of the sea touched by a breathy storm. With an energetic close to the night they bowed to the audience and were received with adulation.

—Dylan Beatch

GLASS KITES / SUPERCASSETTES / FACTS / BED OF STARS

March 15 · Five Sixty

As well as being in a sort of cultural no-mans land, Five Sixty on Seymour Street (the old A&B Sound, to Vancouverites over 25) is itself a sort of void. Cavernous, multi-leveled, and covered all over with small square tiles and whitewashed brick in a Euro toilet chic, the venue feels like a place you're more likely to get lost in than discover anything new at.

There to check out the Glass Kites album release show, I was ready to take that feeling to the bank, but instead I ended up pleasantly surprised by the parade of talented young bands that carried on with the night in front of a sparse, but loving crowd. In a huge venue like Five Sixty you really have to feel for the opening act.

Playing to a couple dozen fans and friends in a space that could easily hold two hundred, Bed of Stars did their best to banish the vacuum of empty space. Singer Evan Konrad,

backed up by the band's beautiful, melodic pop, gave an impressive vocal performance reminiscent of Royston Langdon from '90s glam pop band Space Hog.

"We're not disappointing you, are we?" Konrad asked the early evening crowd. "No? That's good," he replied to an unclear response from the crowd. "At least, I hope that was a no." Bed of Stars closed their set with "Nothing left to Lose," a bouncy crowd pleaser that has been seeing regular airtime on the Peak radio station since the release of their EP *I Fell in Love in the City* last August.

Next, with little ado, following a few choice old school drum and bass and deep house tracks DJed by Wobangs, Facts took the stage. The band seemed determined to give the crowd a primer on their most significant musical influences—a bit of Talking Heads here, some Spoon and the Killers there, at times a Zoorop-era U2 flavour—and so, Facts' set read like a Wikipedia entry on Popular Rock 'n' Roll music of the last

40 years. The homage-mélange was surprisingly pleasing, delivered as it was by accomplished and enthusiastic players, making the show more entertaining and less doggedly derivative than it could have been.

After two full sets the crowd size noticeably increased. But, despite the surge in numbers, the energy remained on the mellow side for the third band on the bill, Supercassette. Seemingly immune to the band's jokes and their exuberant brand of party-fueling synth-rock, folks proceeded to stand at a polite distance from one another and watch Supercassette sweat it out.

"You don't have to be afraid to dance," quipped the lead singer, but the crowd didn't bite. Supercassette played a solid, high-energy set, but ended with a song we were told we may "recognize from TSN." Titled "Good Company," the song was a departure from the rest of their playlist and, owing to its more generic radio rock sound, kind of a down note to end on.

Glass Kites, whose first full-length album came out online January 1, served up an ambitious, all-encompassing look-see at the recently pressed material. Playing the album front to back, engulfed in a swirling display of lights—sometimes like snowflakes, sometimes like spinning galaxies, sometimes like lush grassy green hills disintegrating into nothingness—Glass Kites' set was one part Laser Pink Floyd, one part Sigur Rós junior, and one part makeout room at a '70s high school party.

The crowd at this point had reached peak density, huddling close to the stage and swaying to the band's layered, heavy, dreamy prog rock. Between singer Leon Feldman's acrobatic, Thom Yorke-ish vocals and guitarist Curt Henderson's knife-sharp Jonny Greenwood profile, the Radiohead parallels are hard not to make. To their credit, the band has meticulously composed their way into territory all their own.

After playing the album's closing track, "Slowly (Home)", Glass Kites

shut things down with a tonne-of-bricks-heavy medley of two non-album songs, "Apocalypse" and "Redemption," a howling and relentless jam that broke the dial off at 11. Satisfying.

Wobangs played the crowd out with an appropriately far-out mix of dance hits, from CeCe Peniston to CSS, but perhaps not surprisingly, still no one was dancing.

—Joni Mc Kervey

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