



Lemonheads falter, disappoint audience

By Scott Simonson
Oregon Daily Emerald

PORTLAND — It was the test when you knew the answers but didn't fill in the circles completely or erase stray pencil marks. It was the day when you made it to your bus stop on time, so the bus came early. It was the time when just trying was the best you could do.

It was the Lemonheads' concert at La Luna last Friday. It was a show where all the harmonies sounded like they were sung

through a mouth full of oatmeal. It was a show where even the fast songs sounded slow.

It was a frustrating, enigmatic performance. The Lemonheads stumbled more often than they shone. It left some fans wistfully remembering the band's last Portland performance, a show with Soul Asylum, when the Lemonheads' cover of "Mrs. Robinson" hadn't hit MTV and magazine covers hadn't become infatuated with the comely visage of Evan Dando, the band's singer, guitarist and sometimes-songwriter. It was a sociable, energetic show that made listeners into fans and sent them off to record stores.

This time around, the band was neither unknown nor lacking fan support. But, from the time Dando, bassist Nic Dalton and drummer David Ryan opened with "Confetti," something was missing.

The band seemed to sound all right, but the first five songs were forgettable. Typically, Lemonheads songs are only about two-and-a-half minutes long, but even that length seemed interminable in the early going.

Dando's vocals sounded weak, and he appeared listless and sullen, which may be fine demeanor for orchestra bassoonists but normally isn't a way to magnetize a crowd of teen-age pop music fans.

The up-tempo songs were noisy and uninspired. Neither Dando's vocals or guitar were especially distinctive. Ryan's drumming didn't fit in the mix. One had the feeling that, if Dando wore a watch, he would have

been looking at it through most of the first half-hour of the band's performance.

Things picked up as the songs slowed down. Lemonheads songs often get better the closer they get to an acoustic arrangement featuring Dando alone. The earnest, heartfelt lyrics and Dando's often subdued but melodic vocals are what propel most of the band's good material.

Having disposed of guitar noise for a time, the band played winning versions of mid-tempo and slower songs, including "It's a Shame about Ray," "Big Gay Heart" and "Hannah and Gabi."

When the band turned the volume back up for the second half of the show, it seemed a little more earnest and intense. Dalton stopped playing his bass over by the T-shirt stand and started to throw himself around stage a little bit. Dando started to exert himself vocally.

For a while, the pop band that has always wanted to rock actually did rock, serving up inspired versions of "Rest Assured" and "Down About It." Unfortunately, the band couldn't maintain this level of musical energy for the rest of the show.

Nobody had as much fun as they should have had. It wasn't that the Lemonheads weren't trying, although how hard they were trying was debatable.

Fans were hoping to see the stage version of the persona that Dando projects on Lemonheads albums. As his songwriting style alternates between glib and pensive, between dippy and romantic, Dando presents an intriguing

portrait of the artist as a young rock star.

On this night, though, Dando did little to break barriers between himself and the audience. The fans cheered appreciatively when he donned a baseball hat thrown on stage for a slack rendition of "Being Around."

Opening bands Walt Mink and Hole fared better. Walt Mink worked hard to make some decent songs come to life. Although not a typical Minneapolis band, Walt Mink has adopted the city's "throw yourself into performing and put on a good live show even if your songs aren't very good because if you struggle long enough you'll be able to write good songs about being a struggling band." ethic. After two albums, the band has become far more formidable live than in the studio.

By the time the Lemonheads finished, fans were yelling for an encore, but there wasn't much to hear. The band returned for a good version of "Dawn Can't Decide," went through the motions for two more songs and left.

The lights came on, the fans applauded some more and then they started to leave. As the line formed at the exit, the band returned and played "Rudderless." It was one of the best songs of the evening.

It may have been a second encore, or maybe it was an apology. It sounded most like a promise: Come back next time. We'll do better.

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CINEMA

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However, make no mistake, for die-hard animation fanatics, *Spike and Mike's '93* has equally amazing work as well as fervently cool ideas to match any past production. Yet for the animation layman, it lands in the realm of somewhat less than satisfying.

In earlier festivals, we got a taste of the future with "Beavis

and Butt-head's: Frog Baseball" or the wildly original "Plimptoons." But in this latest collection of wacky animation, what is truly lacking is that one particular sketch that sticks with you when all is said and done.

Although there are some perfectly entertaining pieces, such as "The French Lover's" or the MIT computer-animated "Captain Mighty-O," these scarce highlights cannot completely carry the entire show.

Look for several clever British-made "claymation" spots to spice up dull moments, but even their infrequent appearances are few and far between.

Overall, *Spike and Mike's '93* is not quite the caliber we've seen before, but there are several appealing segments that stretch the imagination and keep things lively enough to be worth your time.

See *Spike and Mike's Animation Festival* if you dare.

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