



Courtesy

The Seattle-based band Boss Martians offers aggressive yet simple melodies on 2003's album "The Set-Up."

Boss Martians, Monolith broaden 'pop' definition

The two bands, which vary from early punk sounds to sunshine pop, will visit Eugene venues soon

By Andrew Shipley
Freelance Reporter

What does the term "pop" mean to you? Unless you've taken a history of music class, probably not a whole lot. The word is slung around so indiscriminately that whatever meaning it once had in the taxonomy of music genres has now all but evaporated.

A comparison that strikingly illustrates the hazy, inexact diversity of pop music is that of the Seattle-based band Boss Martians and the Bay Area trio The Monolith. Both have recently released new albums and will come to Eugene in the next two weeks. Both cultivate distinct styles that thrive at the polar ends of the pop spectrum.

The Boss Martians' album "The Set-Up," released in 2003, draws heavily from influences of 1970s and 1980s punk bands and blends those influences with alternative rock riffs. The result is a pounding but accessible power-pop sound.

The quartet of journeyman West Coast rockers made their name as a surf-rock band beginning in the mid-1990s. The Martians' sound, however, has not rested in these Beach Boys-inspired roots. Frontman Evan Foster's trip to the thematic drawing board this time yields a catchy blend of power-pop and garage punk tracks that older fans of the Martians may find difficult to connect with the band's earlier work.

Thirty seconds into the first track, "I Wanna Be Your Addiction," the

energetic boiling of familiar punk waters is unmistakable. Like many songs on the album, "Your Addiction" opens with a driving guitar riff that carries through a simple chord progression before Foster's nasal sneer finally enters to complete the effect. His voice takes on a powerful, Elvis Costello-like tone, particularly on the most consciously punk-inspired tracks. However, it would be an insult to refer to his crooning as an imitation.

There are still tones of the Martian's earlier hard rock offerings in some of the album's middle tracks. Lyrical content can drag at some points as well, with redundant offerings such as "Executed with precise precision" from the album's title track. And, from "Opportunistic Girl": "She's an opportunistic girl / takes opportunities." These words provide little in the way of thought-provoking complexity.

In the end, the 13 tracks of "The Set-Up" are not about complexity. The album is about aggressive, high-powered tracks that are both instantly appealing and sustainably enjoyable. In this regard, the Boss Martians' newest evolution is a pleasurable success. The band plays next Wednesday at the all-ages WOW Hall, located at 291 W. Eighth Ave. Tickets are \$7, and doors open at 8 p.m.

Sitting on the opposite side of the pop classroom are The Monolith. Rather than feeling out the limits of pop's roughest edges, the band — comprised of Bill Rousseau, Dahlia Ramirez and Rogge — chose to proudly embrace a sound that is unabashedly sunshine pop. But don't let that muddy the waters for you. These simple melodies and synthesized hooks never quite overwhelm the musical depth that keeps "Here Comes the Monolith," their second recording, from floating away.

The band cites The Beatles as one of the group's primary influences. If this

sounds as ubiquitously vague as the definition of pop music, just think spacey, heavily Lennon-esque melodies, and you'll have a pretty good impression of what The Monolith has to offer.

The recording's nine tracks are catchy and could appeal to anyone. This, in large part, is thanks to the trio's two major musical strengths: the male-female harmonies of Rousseau and Ramirez, which are beautiful without feeling manipulative, and a simple guitar backbone that anchors songs that would otherwise be made light by synthesizer riffs and relentlessly upbeat melodies.

All these references to pop are not intended to evoke Hanson imagery. The Monolith alternate between the happy and the strangely melancholic to create a mood that is far from saccharine. "Here Comes the Monolith" floats from track to track with a smooth confidence, and the dream-like effect of this flow should not fool the careful listener into thinking this band is simple.

To escape the trap of synthesizer reliance, The Monolith has employed the help of nine outside musicians who contribute influence as diverse as the violin and the flugelhorn. The first track, "43," digs into your head but you don't feel violated. The final track, the aptly titled "Trilogy," has a distinctive sound that employs trombones, trumpets and the vocal help of Alex Brose.

The result is an album that is diverse and pleasantly enveloping, while falling a little short of epic. There are musical layers in "Here Comes the Monolith" to interest even the most skeptical audiences. The band plays Saturday at the 21-and-over venue Diablo's Downtown Lounge, located at 959 Pearl St.

Andrew Shipley is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

PULSE BRIEF

Bijou late-night movies offer dose of nostalgia

University students can get up a dose of nostalgia, score front-row seats to a Black Sabbath concert and get scared in 3-D at the Bijou Art Cinema's "Midnight Movie Madness" series. The movie theater is offering

late-night showings of old films ranging from "The Princess Bride" to "Japanese Erotic Anime" to "Creature from the Black Lagoon in 3-D." The Bijou shows two late-night films each weekend at around midnight.

"We really do want to appeal to college students," Bijou Manager Louise Thomas said. "And (we) want to create excitement about late night

at the Bijou."

Tickets are \$5 for Friday and Saturday showings and \$4 on Sunday nights. The theater will feature "A Clockwork Orange" and "Miles Davis Live in Munich" this weekend. For a complete schedule and more information, visit <http://www.Bijou-Cinemas.com>.

— Jeff Frawley

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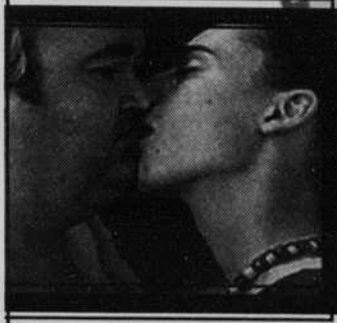
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