

## Bold As a Lamb

I'll never forget the first time I heard **Jucifer**, and in particular, the first 15 seconds of the *Lambs* EP.

It was after Jucifer's appearance on closing night at the old John Henry's, in May of 2002. My girlfriend went and brought home the record, telling me I would love the husband-and-wife duo and their total devotion to intensity. She was right. *Lambs* opens with the most unbelievable dynamic shift from gentle to heavy and loud that I had ever heard, and I was instantly hooked. Another friend who saw that show described their set as being "like the gods descended." Later, when Jucifer headlined the new John Henry's, I – thank you, gods – attended.

Wow.

Upon observing the whole back of the stage stacked with amplifiers, I absently assumed that each opening band would play, take down their equipment, load it into their crummy little van and leave. But amid all the chatting and sipping of PBRs that night, I never noticed that the wall of speakers remained untouched as each band went up and did their thing.

And then Jucifer came out. I am totally not exaggerating that the entire back of the stage – floor-to-ceiling – was the lone

guitar player's setup. That much equipment produces a staggering effect, like standing in a guitar wind tunnel. When the onslaught of volumosity ended, I was physically weakened by what I had endured.

I can't promise perfection from a titan like Jucifer. Guitarist Amber Valentine and drummer Ed Livengood are plagued by technical problems – as can be expected given their sonic monstrosity. But I can assure you that each time I have seen Jucifer I have left stunned. Now, about the time Jucifer's dog bit my drunk coworker. . .

Jucifer and The Athiarchists play at 10 pm Friday, Aug. 29, at John Henry's. 21+ show. \$5. – *Edward Hoopman*



Jucifer

## MTV Tres Is On Fire

San Francisco-based indie rock outfit **The May Fire** serves up rock songs that pack a lot of punch. Sometimes saccharine, sometimes dark and distorted, The May Fire's frontwoman Cat Tasso lives up to her name, growling and purring just like her feline namesake. And it's so right for the music they play, which is at its core pop-punk but not in an obnoxious New Found Glory/Fall Out Boy way. No, this combines the best aspects of punk rock, its energy and heavy riffs, and the catchy, singalong quality of female pop vocals. Like the other bands on this bill, The May Fire has also been featured on MTV3, or MTV Tres, an incarnation of MTV that features music made by Latino musicians (The May Fire's founders, El Pipe and Cat Tasso, are from Columbia and Chile, respectively).

Los Angeles band **Monte Negro** joins the band on tour. Though they share that pop punk sensibility with The May Fire, Monte Negro's vocalist sings *en español* much of the time on their new Epic Records release *Cicarix*. Fellow L.A. band **Astra Heights** rounds out the bill, with a frontman who sings like he grew up idolizing Queen and Bowie. Mark Morales' theatrical, '70s glam rock delivery (complete with falsetto) is coupled with multi-part backup harmonies and songs with several distinct acts; in other words, it's almost like a rock opera, but without a discernible plot. And of all the bands on this bill, Astra Heights probably has the most interesting schtick going for them, not to mention the best lyrics, even if the heyday of the rock opera came and went some 40 years ago (which should not deter you from listening). That could be why, for a brief period, Astra Heights released music under Universal's umbrella but was dropped from the label the day after Universal finally released 2007's *Good Problems*. Too bad, but that's all the more reason to go see these rising rock opera stars when they'll get a bigger cut of your cover charge (and they do a badass cover of "Don't Bring Me Down." Convinced yet?). Astra Heights, The May Fire and Monte Negro play at 8 pm Wednesday, Sept. 3, at the WOW Hall. \$8 adv., \$10 door.

– *Sara Brickner*

Xavier Rudd



## Can You Dance to the Didgeridoo?

Surfers are righteous fun to watch but fucking boring to listen to. It's all dude-this and dude-that, and the bogus insights they dredge up are about about as trite and starry-eyed as they come. I mean, screw the Earth Mother crap, dude; those breaks you ride are the result of lunar forces and gravity working on vast bodies of water, so go wax your board and shut the piehole. The tide is high.

**Xavier Rudd** – the Australian musician/surfer tapped by actor and naked bongoist Matthew McConaughey to score his upcoming movie *Surfer, Dude* – plays all sorts of instruments to fill out his spacey, repetitive, reggae-tinged psychedelic orchestrations, including the didgeridoo in three different keys. The sound on his latest release, *Dark Shades of Blue*, is big and heavy and superfuzzed out, with more effects than effectiveness and more rehash than revelation. Rudd's voice, when you can make it out through layers of synth, sounds like Paul Simon doing the world-music thang, and the Aussie's lyrics have found 50 ways to turn a truism. The music isn't bad; it just isn't that interesting. If you can put your arms out in a Jesus Christ pose and roll your head on your neck with a look of Manson-baby rapture slackening your face, you're ripe for Rudd's planetary groove.

More interesting is Rudd's opener, Nashville-based singer/songwriter **Griffin House**. Grounded in the Americana roots tradition – Townes Van Zandt, Kris Kristofferson and especially new(ish) buck Ryan Adams – House writes gritty, sharply observed songs about the lovelorn and lost. His latest, the spit-polish produced *Flying Upside Down*, finds him branching out into '70s era Stones swing and soaring vocal balladry, but live this stuff should prove fit for the sawdust of any good honkey tonk. Xavier Rudd and Griffin House play at 8 pm Tuesday, Sept. 2, at McDonald Theatre. \$18 adv., \$20 door. – *Rick Levin*

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