

Sunrise Avenue  
Caption: Pop-Twinkies with a dark edge!  
Perri Pagonis

Sunrise Avenue is not your standard issue Finland/Helsinki pop/rock band. Most Greek people remember the Finnish metallistas Lordi from the Eurovision 2006 competition in Athens. The garish, comic book monster-people rockers stole the show and song contest that year with their anthem-stomper track *Hard Rock Hallelujah*. And I must say, as much as I'm a fan of Greek pop singer and that year's show master of ceremonies Sakis Rouvas, he looked more than just a little uncomfortable shaking their scaly, claw-like hands as they received their best song award. Bands like Lordi and the glam-metal icons Hanoi Rocks are indicative of the better-known, Helsinki-trademark, hard rock-sound. But Sunrise Avenue, who played a quick, clever and fun set at Thissio's Asomaton park on June 11, have a nice, mildly-crunchy, dark-edge to their doe-eyed pop tunes that keep the listener engaged and in their hands.

They are something of an anomaly in rock/pop music. Their image is squeaky-clean, and lead singer/2<sup>nd</sup> guitarist Samu Haber is a blonde, cherubic Muppet on the order of the completely germ-free Alexander Rybak of Norway. However, there are dark undertones to their music that keep their pieces yin-and-yang factors in a constant struggle for dominance. They are gaining momentum as a band throughout Europe, but have ecstatic fan clubs in Helsinki and Athens. Their first single, *Fairytale Gone Bad*, went to the number one chart position in both Greece and Finland. The track is full of perky-fast, major chords that keep the listener's mood up and feet moving. However the lyrics, which are indicative of other pieces like *Forever Yours* describe romantic loss, separation and melancholia. It's good teen/adolescent stuff, full of glimpses of real-world emotions, but packaged in a sugary FM power sock-hop song.

When playing live, the band is animated and audience-friendly. Both guitarists and their bassist skitter around the stage and do smiley, heavy eye-contact, *aren't-we-cool-and-involved-with-our-fans* human contact stuff to make us feel like we're important to them. I think it's great and will take it any day. I'd rather watch guys skitter and shake than just stand there and worship themselves, which is a disease many Greek bands have, any time I can get it.

Judging from the good-sized audience turnout, I'd say they're doing a fine job in the listener-demographics, fan club department. The crowd was mostly mid-teens, some dads with cool elementary school kids, and some sexy, mid-twenties office workers. The trendy clothes beat-out the emo fashion by about 70%-30%, which is pretty much like what Sunrise Avenue's music sounds like. It's clean stuff with a grim twinkle; Beach Boys meet Keith Richards. You get the picture. For daily-consumption, ear-candy FM pop you could do a lot worse than Sunrise Avenue. Give them a listen when you get a chance. You may never listen to Alexander Rybak's 2009 Eurovision winning song *Fairytale* again, which, in the larger sense, might be a good thing.

Sunrise Avenue/June 19<sup>th</sup> Sonic Boomtown continuation-

On the more street-fighting aesthete side of the culture, Malcolm McLaren gave a 90-minute grad-school style chat-fest about art and failure, backdoor cultural sabotage, inversion thought-processes, Sex Pistols, early rap music, art school and his granny at the Public bookstore

at Syntagma square on June 17<sup>th</sup>. The famous anti-culture svengali looked fit as a health-spa devotee. His complexion was flawless and he's trim as a university swim coach. Dressed in his pin-stripe seersucker suit and two-tone socks, he looked like a hip, Silicon Valley investment portfolio consultant.

Pop journalist Thanasis Lalas asked straightforward questions about the childhood experiences, artistic background and cultural likes and dislikes to the famed band manager/media manipulator. The affable language translator for the Public bookstore had the best memory of any man I've ever seen. McLaren's answers to the questions tended to be epic in proportion, and this gentleman, whose name I don't know, reported everything, in detail, in perfect Greek, to the attending crowd. This fellow deserves a free latte from the in-house café-bar, no questions asked.

Hard punk music devotees may be shocked to learn that the real roots of British punk rock are McLaren's feisty grandmother and a crusty art-school teacher, both of whom shaped his anti-authoritarian mindset as a young man. The self-described war-baby was raised by his Portuguese grandmother, who abhorred all authority, including school teachers and police. His art school professor, who McLaren openly stated he did not understand and was occasionally terrified of, riveted the idea of inevitable failure into the minds of his pupils. "It is better to be a magnificent, brilliant, flamboyant failure, than a benign success" he drilled into the heads of his students, "because when you fail, you become fearless and can break the rules, and possibly, just for a minute, change the culture and life itself." Which is exactly what McLaren did in the mid-70s/early 80s. Heavy stuff for a Wednesday night at Syntagma square. But good fun, too, and that's what summertime is all about anyway.