

December 15, 2008

Hi Guys-

Here's the Monster Magnet review. I kept it to 800 words. I know you are all very proud of me. Talk soon, yr all so kewl. XO, P

Monster Magnet
Gagarin Club, Athens
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Kurt Cobain once said, and I'm paraphrasing the great, lost songwriter and guitarist of Nirvana, that all music must have some sort of pop-element in it to be accepted by the people. The pop-sensibility in any song makes the piece accessible to the listener, and then the band can add any type of personality to it that they wish. I completely agree with Kurt on this subject of song design, construction and presentation. So, it seems, do piles of other successful bands, but Kurt finally said it for eternity's keepsake.

Nirvana songs were perfect hybrids of Seattle-sound grunge, genetically spliced into a perfect pop-piece. Motley Crue and T.Rex did it with glam-metal/pop, Prince and Michael Jackson copied the same idea with soul/pop, David Bowie with art-school/prog-pop, Shania Twain with country/pop, UB-40 with reggae-pop and the list goes on forever.

By pop elements I mean big song hooks, sing-along lyrics, short, memorable melodies, ear-catching riffs, etc. The guys in the band Monster Magnet appear to follow the same mindset when it comes to their product, and have had great success with it since the early 1990s.

Monster Magnet brought their show to Gagarin club in Attikh for a 2-night gig on December 12th and 13th. The Saturday show was way-past sold-out and the packed-house rocked-out in ecstasy to their thunderous hybrid of stoner-metal/pop nuggets.

Lead singer Dave Wyndorf has a stage presence similar to early Ozzy Osbourne/mid-period Lemme Kilmister in concert and he controls and holds the crowd's attention like a confident veteran. Guitarist Ed Mundell plays heavy Black Sabbath/Tony Iommi influenced riffs, but also borrows from the styles of The Doors's Robbi Krieger, Dandy Warhols's Pete Holmstrom, and legendary Stooges axeman Ron Asheton.

Soundwise, their heavy-bass stoner style is nicely accentuated with good mid-range and high-end equalization in the live show. Bassist Jim Baglino stays nailed to the bottom strings and delivers a fine, melodic throb for the bulk of the performance. Drummer Bob Patella plays non-flashy, solid traps that subtly shift-tempos and feeling while never losing the volcanic backbeat of the piece being played.

Thematically, their songs deal with the issues of consensus reality perception, strychnine-intensive bad acid trips, mental collapse and space travel. On the instrumental side of things, their heavy use of electronic effects including phase-shifters, flangers, space-echoes, digital delays, and wah-wah-pedals create distorted and disjointed aural landscapes which provide an ideal sound background for the mentally-anguished, although playfully-sophisticated lyrics. What separates Monster Magnet from other popular stoner groups like Kyuss and Queens of the Stone Age are their adherence to a, for the greater part, pop-song structure and inclusion of orchestral and operatic technique within that structure. While many stoner groups begin their songs with strong riffing and power chords, many times the song will wander into its own, personal, hyper-space, abandoning the stronghold on the listener's ear. It dissolves into its own weirdness and subjectivity, similar to the work of artists such as Sun Ra and Captain Beefheart. What really gives the Monster Magnets punch in concert is their ability to create, sustain and increase listener tension. Like Richard Wagner's technique in his *Neibelungen Ring* operas, they will stretch minor chord phrases to their absolute breaking-point, until a crescendo major-chord explosion takes place in the piece, which releases the psychic-pressure build-up.

Their material ranges in delivery from delicate, lilting, chamber music intros, Gregorian-style chanting, clean sheets of pure, granite noise, standard-issue arena rock, industrial clanking and sheet metal screech, to brain-stem wounding fusillades of ramming-speed, note-salad bizarreness. Remarkably, all are contained in longish, but accessible and never boring FM format constructions, which save them from becoming listener-indigestible, totally-dismissable, sound glurp.

They played new work from the current CD, *Four-Way Diablo*, and crowd favorites such as "I Will Deny You," and "Space MF." Their finale was a dirge version of Don McLean's classic "American Pie" that had the crowd gaga with disbelief and appreciation of their chosen material to cover.

For the final show of a long, European tour, they played a tight, well-paced, completely professional concert that was worthy of the great critical acclaim they've been receiving for the greater part of their career. For what is basically a cacophony band with a pop-song construction mentality, they can't be beat for originality, ballsy song material, individual style and really tasty live shows. A must-see show for stoner wannabes and devotees alike.