

November 18, 2008

Hi guys-

Here's the Residents concert review. Kooky stuff to be sure.

Talk soon, love on ya, P

The Residents
Pallas Theatre, Athens
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Christy, the Arts editor at Athens News, believes that my musical tastes are, to put it nicely, limited. She says I only like and review heavy metal and girly-girl pop bands and ignore the rest of the practically unlimited musical styles that are out there to be enjoyed. Of course, she's partially right. But she doesn't know why she's right, which is my only remaining trump card to use in our conversations when we haggle about what concert or CD I'll be covering on any given week.

Here's my argument: If you go into any teenager's bedroom, almost anywhere in the world, what will you find crudely scotch-taped to the walls there? You'll find posters. What things are depicted on these posters? The answer, in case you don't already know, are images of metal bands, girly-girls, pop singers and steroided-out, sex-bomb boys. The reason for this phenomenon is simplicity itself: They represent, on both the pre-conscious and conscious level, sex and death, which are the only absolute, sure things in this life. They are complimentary aspects of the unified whole of our existence. Ergo, that's all we, as collective humanity, have in the bank. Also, they look pretty damn cool, which is a real bonus.

Anyway, back to the subject of this article. The Residents's show at the Pallas theatre on Sunday was really neat, despite the fact that they're not a metal band and in no way could they be confused with a female vocal group. The Residents have been around forever. Their first record, *Meet the Residents*, was released in 1972, and started an odyssey of pure avant-garde, compelling musical craziness which has continued to the present day. Forget Bauhaus, Devo, Gwar, The Doors, Talking Heads, early Genesis or any of the other audience-confronting, 4th-wall breaking, ultra-brainy performance art bands. The Residents stand head and shoulders above the fray. They're arguably the weirdest band in the world, but they're really good at it. Just when you think you can't sit through their show, they'll pull something out of their hat that absolutely bitch-slaps the audience's sensibilities and makes their show incredibly compelling to watch and hear.

Their current *Bunny Boy* tour is an audio/visual/theatrical performance piece which touches on the subjects of identity confirmation and self-discovery. The four-man band, dressed in Spanish inquisition-looking rabbit suits with green neon-light eyes, perform in an open, panchromatic white, hexagonally-shaped photo-shoot module. The show's narrator, the Bunny Boy, lopes about the stage, ranting, with semi-coherence, about finding his lost brother, Harvey. One would imagine, in a heavy-handed way, that this is a reference to the 1950 film of the same name starring Jimmy Stewart, and concerns his relationship and exploits with his invisible rabbit friend. Photos of Harvey, as presented to the audience on the projection screen, show only backgrounds, without images of an actual man or animal.

Bunny Boy lives in a similar, 2nd photo-shoot moldule, next to the Residents. When not singing or addressing the audience he sleeps and the band plays incidental music which has all the trademarks of earlier Resident's pieces. They've always had a penchant for using dime-store, plastic-toy instruments which have tinny-cheap tonal sound qualities. The albums such as *Third Reich and Roll*, and *Commercial Album*, are full of these various sounds.

A handful of patrons began to leave the show after about three songs of the visual and audio assault of pure stage-insanity, but they were mistaken to do so. Although difficult at times to endure, the Residents kept their sound track moving from stentorian curtains of noise, to 16th note electronic blips with minor key drones, to straight 4:4 cacophony rock, all with their signature (now digitally reproduced) plastic ray-gun toy sound.

As the show winds down and Bunny Boy gets progressively more wiggy and fried in the head about his quest for Harvey, it may be safe to say that his brother is merely an extension of himself. Bunny Boy never has anyone around to help him confirm his identity and give him personhood. Erratic thoughts of his unsure homicide of Harvey could easily be seen as thoughts of suicide. Is Bunny Boy a consensus-reality rabbit or or just someone in a rabbit suit? With no one to confirm his objective self, how can he be sure of anything?

The finale of the show which features Bunny Boy bravely walking into the unknown void is as impressive as anything ever written by Beckett or Ionesco: A man in a rabbit suit tries to find himself in the epicenter of absolute, ecstatic, throbbing nothingness. Storywise, you can't beat it. You can't even try.

So Christy, just so you know, the Residents were a pretty good show. But even Bunny Boy, with all his existential wanderings, dilemmas and quests for identity couldn't prove anything more than Pussycat Dolls or Metallica in their concerts. All we still know for sure is the certainty of sex and death. But the Bunny Boy is ok with me, and if he'd like to come with me to the next Motley Crue show and later go to the gentleman's clubs on Syngrou avenue for some carrot juice and conversation he's more that welcome to come along for the fun. But I'm driving. That's one thing for sure.