

The Rockets  
After Dark club, Exarcheia  
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The Rockets: Red hot and way past cool!

Go cats, go! I mean it, man! The Rockets, a four-man, super-charged rockabilly band centered in Athens, secretly save the world from self-appointed seriousness every time they mount the stage to play a gig. They are the current European torch bearers of such musical titans as Gene Vincent, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Dave Alvin. Greece is actually a better place to live because of their presence here. Their high-stepping, rip-it-up-and-go performance at After Dark club in Exarcheia on March 13<sup>th</sup> was a celebration of muscle shirts, pony tails, brilliantine, DA hairdos, tattoos, push-up bras, two-tone shoes, skinny ties and classic 1950s rock n' roll culture. James Dean, the mutant king of 50s turbo-cool nervousness and Elvis Presley, the jet-propelled Seal-of-the-Prophets of rock, both would have loved this show.

Lead singer and rhythm guitarist, Ace Moreno is a Kate Moss-thin, Robert Gordon clone, both in his appearance and vocal style. He shakes and bops through every tune they deliver with such pathos one fears his heart may give-out from sheer enthusiasm for his work. Lead guitarist Rockin' Pete switches between a single-coil solid-body Telecaster and semi-hollow body guitars for his stage tools. His style is understated flash, like a cross between Scotty Moore and X's Billy Zoom. He uses plenty of reverb and tremolo amplifier effect for a vintage 50s sound. Drummer Chris is a four-on-the-floor solid player and unflappable in temperament, like the Rolling Stones' pantheon drummer, Charlie Watts.

However, the real show-stopper is bassist Buddy 67's. With his powder-blue colored, double-bass bull fiddle he slaps, plucks and even rides the mammoth instrument like a rock n' roll kid at the local luna park. While holding down a rock bottom rhythm or playing solos, his presence is the visual anchor to the kinetic stage activity. For a band that has only been together for five years, they play like comfortable, very seasoned pros who have been through hell and back together and emerged stronger because of the experience.

Their set began with the Johnny Cash classic, "Folsom Prison Blues." In their arrangement the metronomic speed shifts from standard ballad format to full-blown rave-up pace with plenty of stops and starts to keep the attention of the listener nailed to the piece. They have a good range of songs, both originals and classic covers such as Jerry Lee Lewis's "High School Confidential" and Elvis's "Because, Just Because." Also, their set-pacing is excellent and includes slow, mid-tempo, fast and speed-of-sound material that ebbs and flows nicely as the show progresses. Set highlights include the phantasmal, "Ghost Highway," the strutting "Baby Blue," and the pure fun pieces "I Can't Wait" and "Hot Rod Boogie."

What really sets the Rockets apart from the slag heap of rave-up bands is their sense of unshakable loyalty to the classic rockabilly genre and their great understanding of on-stage

sound dynamics. Many younger bands take classic material from the 1950s, such as Chuck Berry, Little Richard or Bo Diddly radio songs and simply turn up the guitar volume to unbearable levels, scream their molars out when singing the lyrics, and call it art. The Rockets, while occasionally changing the arrangements of their covers, always stay true to the sound color, pathos and style of the classic material.

Apart from playing expertise, their sense of dynamics is their strongest asset as a playing ensemble. As important as it is to have appreciable volume in rock, it is also of paramount importance to know when to fade-in, fade-out, roar, whisper, wail and completely shut-up from time to time. Bands like The Who, Pink Floyd, Roxy Music and the Beach Boys were absolute masters of sound dynamics. Sound craftsmen like Pete Townshend, Richard Wright, Phil Manzanera and Brian Wilson constructed songs that were not merely clever verse/chorus combinations, but audio landscapes that moved from barely audible peeps to tsunami-esque supernovas, all with a seamlessness to their design that always felt completely organic and never with a sense of them being patched together merely for the purposes of sound variety.

The Rockets play authentic rockabilly with an up-to-date feel that is a singular joy to behold in live performance. Their playing pathos is unbeatable, their musicianship is tops and they really appear to be having a blast on stage as they present their songs. They get my highest recommendation as an act to go see live in concert. Their next show is on April 30<sup>th</sup> at the Gagarin club on Liossion Avenue. Be there or be square.