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Hi guys-

here's the top ten concert review. Read and tremble. Talk soon, Big P

Top Ten Concerts 2008
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In the larger sense of things, Sonic Boomtown, and my current employment at Athens News, wouldn't have been possible without the help of my friend and colleague, Barney Spender. He is the big sportswriter-kahuna at the paper. This summer when I was trawling for jobs and getting rejected by everybody and their mamas, Barney gave a good word to Editor-John, the big manager-kahuna at our office.

Barney is one of the most mild-mannered, likeable guys I've ever met. I'm sure when he approached John to give me a good word, it was a bit awkward for him, as I'm not the most mentally stable person in the world. I can see him now, in my mind's eye, looking downward, shuffling his feet, and saying something like, "Perri's just a wee bit out there, but very polite. And, at least most of the time, dangerous only to himself."

My interview the next day with kahuna-John lasted about 30 minutes. 20 of those minutes were spent discussing the minutia of the superb American TV series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. He took me on, with enthusiasm and without hesitation, to review some concerts. Here are some text snapshots of the best of them, and some I just saw on my own.

Ten. Hara Kefala at Aggelon Vimon Theater, Omonia (January and February Engagement). I was breaking-up with a girlfriend and becoming sick in the head this January. One of the places I was rejected for work doing some sort of secretarial nonsense was at an office close to the Aggelon Bimon theater behind Omonia square. After another spirit-crushing episode of conversation with yet another generic office manager, I wandered into the theater's bar for some tea. I stayed to watch the evening's show and was really glad I did.

Hara Kefala is a tight-bodied, cabaret pin-up cutie with a set of vocal pipes that can easily shatter a high-voltage ceramic insulator. She and her pianist cover the full range of emotional torch songs from Liza Minelli to Kurt Weill. In Greek, French and English their show can't be topped for high-quality, budget-priced entertainment. Watch for a return engagement somewhere in the city during 2009.

Nine. 700 Machines, February 2, After Dark club, Exarchia. There are several established local bands who play the Exarchia area that are well-worth your time to see. 700 Machines is definitely one of these groups. Their hard rock/boogie/blues style of play magnetizes the listener and holds one's attention like a low-altitude fireworks display.

Their twin-guitar frontal attack stage presence reminds one of early BlueOyster Cult's Buck Dharma and Eric Bloom in their glory days. Watch for them as support when big name groups come to town or during the winter and spring seasons at smaller clubs in the city center. Real rock, no waiting.

Eight. REM, October 5, Kallimarmaro stadium, Metz. Truth be told, I never got into REM when I was a kid. Alternative rock tends, for the most part, to bore me and I went to cover this show because it was close to my house. It was a really pleasant surprise to see these middle-age guys play with such soul, fun, intelligence and craziness all at the same time.

It was the self-welcoming party for MTV Greece and I thought all performers would simply show-up, play a quick set and scam, but I was mistaken. All groups who took the stage that day: C-real, Gabriella Cilmi, Kaiser Chiefs and REM played solid, professional sets, with genuine pathos. REM played an outstanding, full 90-minute show, showcasing vintage stuff and new material. It was one of the best free-shows I've ever seen. Half of Athens was there to witness it. Ask anyone who was there and they'll tell you the same thing.

Seven. Invisible Surfers, November 7, Gagarin Club, Attikh. A few years ago a friend gave me a copy of the Invisible Surfers CD, *Dogs Killa Cat*. It stayed in my car's CD player for at least 2 years and was the only thing I listened to when cruising around the city. I couldn't get enough of it.

In concert the Surfers are a force of nature to behold. Although their stage movements range from little to none, their skittering leads and oceanic rhythms leave one mouth agape at their talent and songwriting skills. They are one of the best instrumental, power-surf bands in Europe if not the world. Opening band Down n' Out played Texas-flavored southwestern rock that impressed even the strict devotees of that musical culture. Look for new releases from both groups in 2009.

Six. Venom, July 20, Technopolis, Gazi. It was hot as hell that day in Gazi. The Rock 'em All festival featured six metal bands in their program with Venom being the headliner. When they took the stage that evening, I finally, truly understood what the adjective "apocalyptic" really means.

I'm sure that dogs and cats for many kilometers began biting themselves in agitation and that electric appliances in nearby homes began browning out or ceased working completely for an hour or so as Venom performed. They played songs which I can only describe as a solid iceberg of noise and distortion that either terrifies or thrills the intended listener. Good fireworks and smoke bombs made this one unforgettable show for those who were brave enough to stay the course.

Five. Ducky Boys, May 2, After Dark Club, Exarchia. The Ducky Boys are my favorite band in Athens. They play real hard rock/punk/rockabilly with glory, grit and wild abandon, exactly as it should be played. Their strong fan club in the city center is well-deserved, as the rockabilly community uses them as a focal point for their gatherings and entertainments.

Guitarist Haris is the embodiment of the rock n' roll psyche. He's simultaneously hot and cool, flashy and laid back, and pro and erratic without sacrificing anything from one to augment the other. They play concerts often in Exarchia and should be seen and appreciated by those with an interest in the rockabilly genre. Genuine local heroes. Don't miss them.

Four: Def Leppard, July 1, Kairaskaki stadium, Faliro. Sasa Basta, my favorite centerfold bouzoukia singer, was on the cover of Max magazine this July. I instantly snapped up a copy from my local kiosk to see her many talents in the photo spread and then, quite by accident, saw an article about Def Leppard somewhere in the back pages. I had never seen Def Leppard as a kid and when I proposed the idea to kahuna-John about covering their show he gave my idea the big thumbs-up.

The show was extraordinary and professional as a surgical military strike against opposing force hard-targets. After 27 years of being together, Def Leppard still play like wild youth, but with seasoned skills. Both new and old material sounded inspired and was played to digital perfection on stage. And, for your information, my next article in July was an interview with Sasa Basta. In August she was on the cover of

Nitro magazine with yet another full photo spread of her many talents. I accept full credit for helping to advance the career of a budding superstar.

Three: Public Enemy, November 30, Gagarin club, Attikh. If Public Enemy were any greater they'd explode from their own weight. Chuck D and Flavor Flav have been rapping their brains out about society and its injustices for 20-plus years and have only improved with age. Their show at Gagarin club this November was a brain-rattling, tour-de-force of funk/rap/throb that kept the crowd dancing like electrified rats the entire time they were on stage.

DJ Lord's solo turntable opening set was the stuff of legend and when Chuck D, Flavor and their full electric band arrived on stage, glorious pandemonium ensued. Best show at Gagarin club this year. I guarantee it.

Two: Thievery Corporation, October 11, Brahon Theater, Vyronas. The most singularly animated music show to hit town this year. All instrumentalists, including DJs, drank 15 espressos before climbing on stage. Theater Brahon became the epicenter of perpetual motion as Thievery Corporation boogied their way through the biggest multi-cultural dance party I've ever witnessed.

Advanced technology met jungle rhythms and traditional dance met post-contemporary interpretation of traditional dance. Sitar players and Les Paul slingers twanged themselves silly and more groovy little percussion instruments were put into use that I can count. There truly is hope for world music, and Thievery Corporation is one of the flagholders.

One. Iron Maiden, August 2, Terravibe park, Malakassa. Iron Maiden is the only long-term extreme heavy metal band I can think of that has actually improved with age. There are plenty of older metallistas who keep chugging along because it beats selling cars for a living, but Maiden is the genuine article.

With bassist Steve Harris at the creative controls, their product sounds even more fresh and inspired now than it did in the early 1980s. Their stage show is brain-scrambling to behold and they don't stay still for one second. If you see one metal show in the next year or so, see this one. You'll tell your children's children's children about it.

So that's my spin on the 2008 concert scene. However, I learned lots of other far more important stuff this year than merely how to critique a rock show. I learned the value of friendship, trust and respect, which is more powerful than any electric guitar played at its highest setting.

Without the trust and help of my friend Barney, I wouldn't be writing any of this mess in the first place. Without the help and respect from kahuna-John and my always forgiving text editors Christy and Leah, I'd be out of luck completely in the text presentation department. I thank you all for believing in me and giving me a chance to do what I love for a living.

In this current time of terrible economic difficulty, uncertainty and confusion it is important, now more than ever, to have loved ones and respected friends near to you. Music is great and helps beautify our lives. But, one must remember, it is only a reflection of our frail human condition and the world could easily continue without it.

So to all Athens News readers and everyone, I wish you all health, friendship, prosperity and, certainly, a few good tunes in 2009. To be sure, on every level, the show will continue to go on.