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Puppets, pit bulls make wild concert

Page 8 The Battalion Thursday, November 2, 1989



Photo by John Righter

The Meat Puppets

By John Righter

Of The Battalion Staff

AUSTIN — In an era of labels and categories, Phoenix's Meat Puppets have successfully confounded, amazed and perturbed critics and fans alike with their unprecedented fusion of hardcore thrash, progressive rock, cow-chipping country, acid psychedelia, grunge metal, jazz exploration, deep-seated blues and modern pop into one indeterminable, unpredictable but refreshingly original genre of Puppet sound.

Lead singer and guitarist Curt

Kirkwood explained in an interview before the Puppet's show at Austin's Liberty Lunch Saturday night, "We always get people who go out of their way to describe us, to compare us to different bands. It took me a long time to figure out why we didn't sound like anyone else, why couldn't describe our sound . . . it's because we're us. We sound like me, and as a band, three individuals, we're different than anyone else."

The band's sound is not the only thing that sets them apart. The Puppets approach the cynical, businessoriented music industry differently than most bands. Kirkwood justifies the band's radical stylistic changes such as the leap from the thrash-ex-cess madness of *Meat Puppets* to the desert-punk meets honkey blues of-Meat Puppets II, as a growth from a threesome of agressive teenagers to

"My will to piss people off diminished from record to record," he said. "I used to love to piss people off . . . to put out an album that people were going to buy and wonder 'Well what the hell is this.'"

The Puppets formed in 1980, Kirkwood joined by brother Cris on bass and vocals and Derrick Bostrom on drums. That year the band opened for Black Flag in Phoenix, and later signed a record deal with Flag's SST label. After a healthy relationship, which includes eight albums, the Puppets have reached a legal tussle with their label, spurred by SST's refusal to allow Atlantic Records to promote and distribute their new album, *Monsters*. Explains Kirkwood, "The distri-

bution is not happening. I feel like SST is purposely trying to screw us cause they're afraid we're going to jump, and we are now ... if not enough people show up, then you know what is happening. It's the record company.

'Hell. (Monsters) entered at 10 on Rock Pool and number 11 on CMK (college airplay charts), which is phenomenal for an indie. It entered there, and they're (SST) not going to follow it up with sales. Yeah, I'm bummed. There's a lot of money going down the tubes.

Hoping to put the legal issues behind, the band embarked on tour, where the Meat Puppets are at their best. Trying to clarify the Puppets on record is hard enough, but a Puppet performance is totally undefinable, warping and twisting recorded material into high-fueled, spontaneous mutations.

Kirkwood said of the Puppets live image, "We were radical; we were al-

\$100

\$100

ways crazed live. That's why we didn't get famous and all those other bands did. Because we're crazed live. We put out good records, but then when the fans come out to see us we f--k 'em up. We blow their minds, and the ones that want their minds blown go with it.'

"That's why we won't open for anyone. All these bands that opened for us are playing in arenas, but we're not going to be opening for anyone. Camper (Van Beethoven) opened for 10,000 Maniacs. I don't see the Meat Puppets opening for some 10,000 Maniacs, nor opening for any Cure and Love and Rockets (like the Pixies). I don't like to open for people. I like to have midgets come out and do back flips before

we go on."
Unfortunately, Saturday's performance didn't feature any acrobatic midgets, but it did, between encores, have a stupid-pet-trick segment with a pit bull that could swung around on a two by four by holding it with its teeth, and then danced with the band for the audience's amusement. Of course, before this the Meat

Puppets had only succeeded in waging a paralyzing assault on the audi-ence's senses. Interweaving hard-core stomping, two-step kicking, blues-based metal bashing and jazz tripping into a two and a half-hour set (which occurred between 12:30 and 3 a.m., no less), leaves one pondering the more bizarre points of

Not to mention, the style defines the crowd, attracting a sociologist's dream for group studies. Forget Halloween, there's more creativity and ghoulish figures within a Pup-pets show than any congested ma-cabre at Austin's 6th Street.

Not that it has any bearing on the Pup's frenzied manifold of multiferious madness, which alternates from pleasant and soothing, trippy and disturbing, before finally evolving into a culmination of complete chaos.

Curt is a sinister twist of himself on stage, dropping a serene, laid back attitude for complete pain and annihilation. Even the rhythmic "Enchanted Porkfist" appears to send Kirkwood into a realm somewhere between ecstasy and destruction. A revolutionary player on guitar, no greater success story abounds than Kirkwood's progression from a meager three-chord basher to an impromptu wizard.

Unfortunately, for all their effort and madness, the Meat Puppets can't help but feel the weight of being squashed by the industry they so openly defy. At no greater time does the symbolism of Meat Puppets ring clearer than with the closing phrase of "Like Being Alive."

Kirkwood explains, "The words Imagine being eaten by a giant doodoo log with teeth' say that you think you can walk in shit and wipe it off, but you can't, 'cause the shit you step in nowadays will bite your foot off. It's a different world we live in today . I'm just really confused by it.

Fortunately for Kirkwood, he's not the only one. The world can be a confusing and disturbing place, especially when you're pulling strings with a Meat Puppet at three in the

Aggie Flashback

gathered from past issues of The Battalion and reflects activities that occurred during this week in A&M's history.

10 years ago — University officials decided to allow women to participate in bonfire construc-

tion activities. 25 years ago — The Battalion sports department ran the head-line "Porkers invade Aggieland" above a story about the Arkansas

football team's visit to campu 50 years ago — The last order of Aggie senior rings for the Fall of 1939 arrived. This brought the total number of rings ordered for

that year to 421. 75 years ago — A&M had an Anti-Swearing Club which boasted a membership of 100 people. The goal of the club was to keep profane language from being used on campus and to preserve the "clean spirit" of the

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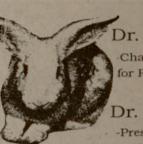


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