



Cocteau Twins captivate with lights, music

By Rob Newberry

The Cocteau Twins are a band that I like to listen to while I drift off to sleep. That considered, maybe it was a bad idea to drive nine hours from Lubbock to see them play in Houston on Thursday night. Then again, maybe it wasn't.

The show started just after 8 p.m. at the Avalon club, with Galaxie 500 opening the show with a short 25-minute set. Galaxie 500's tunes were in the same mellow vein as the headliner, except for a more distinct, angrier harshness with the lyrics. The Cocteau Twins took the stage around nine, and were off by 10:30.

Materialwise, the Cocteau Twins tried to satisfy old fans as well as those they picked up with their most successful release, *Heaven or Las Vegas*. The set was heavy on the numbers from the new record, but they threw in older tunes like "Love's Easy Tears" and "Blue Bell Knoll."

For the tour, the Cocteau Twins have

brought in two guitarists to assist Robin Guthrie and Simon Raymonde in reproducing the multi-layered Cocteau sound. It's the first time I've ever watched four guitars on stage at one time, each one playing completely different parts, and they managed to bring out a convincing copy of their recorded music. But with a four-foot wall of electronic effects equipment, I'm not really surprised.

I wasn't the only person at the show who wondered if watching Liz Fraser sing would help me understand the lyrics a little better. Not to offend any Cocteau devotees — I know her lyrics aren't the point of the music — but I thought I might understand more of them by watching and hearing it live. No such luck — the show sounded just like turning the albums up to nightclub loudness, which is not something I usually do with my Cocteau Twins discs.

I also wondered what kind of visual element the Cocteau Twins would try to give their live show, since the audio is definitely in a class by itself. I wasn't disappointed; the Twins used one of the more interesting, and very appropriate, light shows I've seen. Behind the stacks of gizmos, lots of purple, blue and white lights made patterns on a translucent curtain and swung back and forth across the audience and stage. For "Iceblink Luck", the Cocteau Twins reproduced the red, green and gold backgrounds that define that song's video.

Before I went, I'd heard many warnings about seeing the Cocteau Twins live. Most fans are doubtful that their music can be as powerful played live. But while nothing is really added musically during their performance, the visual effects and captivating guitar playing actually do make listening to Fraser's soulful howling even more enjoyable.

New Bohemians prove musicianship in performance

By Rob Newberry

While both records by Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians failed to convince me of the band's musicianship, the band's live performance at the Tower Theatre in Houston Friday removed most of my doubts.

Opening the show was Houston's David Rice doing a solo acoustic set. Rice's 12-string playing is OK, and his lyrics have real thought behind them. But Rice's delivery comes off like he is trying too hard to be artistic, and by the time he ended his 45-minute set, I was yawning every minute or so from pure boredom.

Brickell and the New Bos came on stage around 9:45 for a set that lasted nearly an hour and a half. They opened with "Woyaho" from the new disc, *Ghost of a Dog*, then proceeded through a slew of songs

from both their efforts, including "Mama Help Me," "Nothing," "Carmelito" and "Forgiven."

Listening to the records, I always thought the New Bos guitar parts were cool, but I guess I figured they were overdubs and not as hard as they sound. On Friday, I watched in near awe as Kenny Winthrow reproduced those fancy riffs note-for-note, from the interesting intro of "Strings of Love" to the melodic work on "Stwisted."

Watching Brickell sing is another treat. The records don't allow you to see just how much energy she puts into every vocal. But when she steps up to the mike with a very, very timid "thank you," then belts through her soulful lyrics with total determination all over her face, you get the idea

that singing isn't easy for her, but important enough that she gives it her all.

There was one disappointing factor in the show, though. Whenever I go see a live performance, I hope the band will play around with the music a little, and not give me just a replica of their recorded material. Almost all the songs at the show sounded just like the versions on the albums, and I wish the New Bos would have loosened up a little more. Only during "Love Like We Do" did the band seem to experiment, and Brickell's vocals could have been taken right from the tapes during every song except "What I Am."

Brickell announced in the middle of the show that the band wanted to

try a few new things, so the set did have some of the spontaneity I like at a concert. The band ripped through covers of Paul McCartney's "Jet" and Steely Dan's "Do It Again," and also tried out a new country song of their own. Their cover of Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall" was good, but they recorded that number for the *Born on the 4th of July* soundtrack, and this performance was just like the recording.

I did enjoy watching the show and seeing Winthrow's guitar work in action, as well as impressive work by John Bush on percussion and Matt Chamberlain on drums. But I wish the band had experimented more on stage and shown me that they are actually capable of a good rock 'n' roll jam session.