

# Majosha sets forth a new attitude with "Party Night!"

By **ALLISON PIKE**  
Staff Writer

*Party Night! 5 Songs About Jesus.* This is the title of the new Majosha tape. Yes, it sounds hip. Yes, it sounds mod. Maybe even a little cool, too. The band members even admit they've got a "new attitude" — one that they'll present tonight at their tape release party at the ArtsCenter.

Funny thing, though, an attitude is just about the only thing Majosha doesn't have. Their new tape proves that a band doesn't have to play together for a decade in order to find its own musical niche. "Party Night!" is a competent, mature collection of three new songs plus a more sophisticated version of "Get That Bug" from their previous tape.

The new "Get That Bug" is much more polished and its tempo is quicker. Violin tracks add a soft, lacy layer to the song, while accordion is used to lend an earthy tone.

"The effect of the song is supposed to be like a couple of old men sitting on a porch," said bassist Ben Folds. During the song's recording, Folds, guitarist Millard Powers, and previous drummer Dave Rich scrounged through a box of noisemakers, finding a "dinger thing" and other instruments to scatter through "Bug." "We used any instrument with which we could get close to the earth kinds of sounds," Folds explained.

"Cool Whip" is a light, fun song. But what does it mean? "That's

one of those rehearsal songs," said Folds. "Normally I would throw something like that away. I tried, but it kept coming back and everyone was running around the studio singing the chorus. The song isn't a strong piece of art, but it is catchy and people like to listen to it."

The most daring song in this collection is "Guilty," about what Majosha calls "the plight of the middle class white guy." Here, Majosha continues its reputation of writing about the different stages of life. Powers says the point of the song could be related to the "Get That Bug Syndrome" — when pressure and tension get the best of a person. The song's lyrics could be interpreted as sarcastic or sympathetic, even Folds admits they are a bit tongue in cheek.

"Nobody feels sorry for him (middle class white guy) for anything. Everybody expects him to succeed. Take me and Millard. Obviously we won't be going off to war tomorrow or anything like that. But our fathers maybe went to Vietnam, or our grandfathers were in World War II. Everybody has seen some kind of struggle of some sort and now it's up to us. You're expected to carry on a certain amount of success."

The highlight of "Party Night!" is the highly crafted, technically superb "Kalamazoo." The song has a big sound, juxtaposing a murky, shadowy tone with a shrill, electric one. Powers had a good time with this song and his guitar work shows it. The solo toward the end



Majosha, whose original members include Ben Folds, Dave Rich and Millard Powers, performs tonight at the ArtsCenter.

of the song conjures images of creeping along on a foggy, steamy Loch Ness waiting for the monster or tearing through a tunnel on a train where the lights along the walls mesh into one long line of speed.

"The idea behind the song is a mood," said Powers. "It's supposed to reflect when we were traveling in Michigan. It's the idea of hopping into one place in the country

without having any ties there and taking it in like a snapshot. The tune is arranged to have the effect of each verse being a page turning."

Majosha have come a long way since they got together a year ago. Last October they performed at the CMJ Showcase at the Bitter End in New York, and this week they go back to the Big Apple to work on a house-mix version of

"Get That Bug" to be promoted in Japan. Their plans after tonight's show are to play all the time. The band also has a new line-up. Chris "Hound Dog" Brown handles drum duties now. Evan Olsen is the band's new front man, taking over lead vocals from Folds. No matter how far Majosha's career goes, the members will probably never take themselves too seriously. The title of the tape pretty much makes that point clear.

## Blues veteran Taj Mahal majestically captures crowd

By **PAUL STEWART**  
Staff Writer

Thank God for the blues. Last Wednesday night the Carrboro ArtsCenter served as the backdrop for blues artist Taj Mahal, who performed to a sellout crowd of more than 450 people.

Mahal, who has experimented with blues, ragtime, calypso and reggae for over 20 years, decided upon blues that night. And blues he did play, alternating between his National Steel guitar and a

piano as accompaniments to his weathered blues yowl.

Opening for Mahal was folk singer Rod McDonald. McDonald can best be described as a weak amalgam of Joni Mitchell and Harry Chapin. Though his performance somewhat embodied their two styles, he lacked the storytelling ability of Chapin and the vocal depth of Mitchell. The crowd was kind though, and he received a more than lukewarm response.

But it was Mahal that they were

there for and when he took the stage the crowd came to life.

Dressed in big tan baggy pants and a rainbow-colored shirt with matching shirt and shoes, Mahal came on stage looking more like George Clinton than a master of the blues. However, after launching into a blues instrumental that lasted over five minutes, all doubt was dispelled.

Mahal continued playing for about 30 minutes, going into some of his classics such as "Fishin' Blues"

and "Going Up to the Country and Paint My Mailbox Blue," before taking a 25-minute break.

Mahal returned by jumping back into the rhythm of things, bending notes, and even delving into a bit of Mississippi Delta Blues that would have even made Muddy Waters proud.

His second set ended after about 25 minutes worth of music. He returned with a blues capella as his encore, before retiring for the night.

Though he played to this almost entirely white audience for little more than an hour, I'm sure few felt cheated. The usually reticent Mahal commented that he wasn't feeling well on stage for the first time in 30 years and easily gained the understanding of the audience. What he lacked in quantity, he more than made up for in quality.

Mahal though, is typical of the dying breed of black blues artists. His albums have rarely sold more than 100,000 copies while those of white radio-oriented blues artists' albums such as Stevie Ray Vaughn and Eric Clapton, continue to go gold.

This racial disparity is in all likelihood what kept the lower-income portion of the black community away from the event since ticket prices were \$10 and \$12.

The newly-built ArtsCenter cannot be faulted though. They have an excellent facility with acoustics in mind. (And they sell beer.)

If the ArtsCenter can continue to attract quality artists like Mahal, it's well worth one's effort to pay it a visit. As for Mahal himself, if he can treat the ladies as well as he can play his guitar, he has nothing to be blue about.

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