

Widespread Panic's Show Truly 'Eclectic'

I have a confession to make. Before last week, I had never really heard much of Widespread Panic's music, and I had never been to the Southern-Gothic campus of Dook. I guess sometimes you have to take the good with the bad, so I sucked it up and bummed a ride to Page Auditorium to see Widespread Panic on Sept. 29.

CHARLIE SPEIGHT

Concert Review
Widespread Panic

Dookies — you've seen one, you've seen them all. As we stood outside the door of the auditorium, they floated by in flocks. One particular couple — we'll call them Claire and Tobias — seemed to haunt us all night.

"I remember the first time we saw these guys back home in New Jersey," recalled Claire. "That was the first time Daddy let me drive the Mercedes."

"Yeah, that was such an eclectic event. The spontaneity was invigorating," added Tobie.

That inspired us to enter the auditorium and take our place among the wicked. We didn't quite fit in with the Dookies, though. After all, neither of us had a J. Crew plaid shirt tied around our waist or a 'Dook' hat attached to our belt loop. Nonetheless, we were ready to hear some Widespread Panic and no Dookie was going to begrudge us that pleasure.

Foremost on my mind throughout the show was my attempt to find a short phrase to classify the sound I was experiencing. These catchy, categoric clichés are the essential weapon of the music reviewer (For example: "a blend of pop/rock with rich R&B overtones" or "intense-melodious-edgy-precision-grunge-rock.") Widespread Panic, however, may well be the first band to defy this convenient method of classification. For those who have heard Widespread Panic, you understand what I mean. For those of you who have not, try to follow along...

Close your eyes and picture six middle-aged fishing buddies from (surprise, surprise) Athens, Georgia forming a band. The guitarists really dig Southern blues (Allman Brothers style) and the lead singer figures that Dan Fogerty is the quintessen-

tial vocalist. Sounds like your typical Southern rock band so far, huh?

Well then, we'll just throw in a drummer who has mastered quite a few powerful gimmicks and a keyboardist who intergrates a little melody when the guitars get thin. Oh yeah, and let's not forget the most distinctive feature of Widespread Panic's music, the percussionist. This man reminds me of my fifth grade music teacher. This man played bongos, congas, moraccas, bells, chimes and even one of those tiny drums with the two little beaded strings that everyone played at the end of "Karate Kid II." During one song he pulled out one of those rain sticks that they sell at Epcot Center, and I think he even grabbed a couple of spoons and beat them against a coffee can. His focus, however, was on the congas, which he played in true reggae fashion.

This band really puts out some sound. I felt like I was being treated to a big blues jam session. During the second set, one of the songs turned into a 30-minute jam. These guys really enjoy their music and they really enjoy being on stage.

Don't assume, however, that their show consists of anything but good, honest music. These guys aren't pushing for any kind of image, unless of course you consider JCPenney meets Dan's Truck Stop to be a valid style these days. Take these guys at face value and you might just expand your musical taste; I know I sure did. They may well be one of the only alternatives to "alternative" around these days.

I think even Claire and Tobias were impressed. I mean, the last time Dook experienced widespread panic was when the new L.L. Bean catalog was mailed one week late.

Being from Chapel Hill, however, affords me a bit more credibility than two Dookies. From the untainted opinion of a first time witness, I can truly say that seeing Widespread Panic live was "an eclectic event. The spontaneity was invigorating."

Translation: Widespread Panic is for real. I recommend that you check these guys out.

Box Set Highlights His Purple Majesty's Best Work

What do you do if you've become one of the best musicians in the world, made more money than you can possibly spend, have a following of millions, and can have any woman, anywhere, solely because of your fame? Retire from recording and change your name to an unpronounceable symbol?

That's not the answer most people would give, but Prince has never been one to go with the flow. A few months ago, after releasing his best album yet, Prince mysteriously announced his retirement and left all of his devoted fans wondering if they would ever hear from His Purple Majesty again.

Well, the prayers of Prince's loyal subjects have been answered — sort of. Warner Bros. has released a three-disc set of the best that (the former) Prince has to offer. Unlike standard greatest hits compilations, this set includes many tracks that weren't played on radio or that were previously unreleased. This feature is especially desirable for this set because many of Prince's best songs contain lyrics you wouldn't want your mother to hear. In fact, lines from Prince's *Purple Rain* inspired Tipper Gore to begin her advisory labeling campaign.

Musically, this set is superb. The first two discs contain all of His Royal Badness' most famous hits: "Let's Go Crazy," "1999," "Raspberry Beret," "7," "Little Red Corvette," and many others. However, the true gems of this album are Prince's originals that other artists put on the charts. Chaka Khan made "I Feel For You" famous in the mid-'80s, but Prince's original on this set drives with more force. "Nothing Compares 2 U," transformed

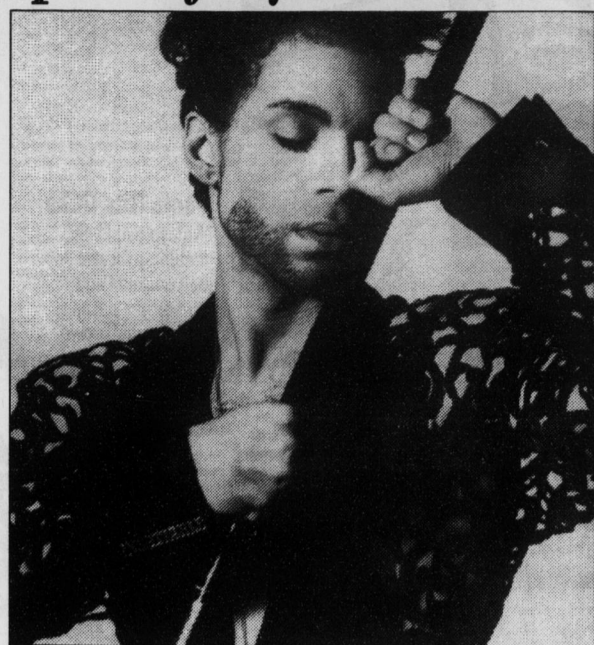
into a colossal hit by fellow iconoclast Sinead O'Connor, is a live track on the second disc. This tune, sung as a duet with New Power Generation member Rosie Gaines, never made it on an album because it lacks the funky style that characterizes Prince's music. But this version is magnificent and proves that Prince is a truly great songwriter who can transcend any genre.

Indeed many of the songs on the third disc, which contains B-sides, don't sound like typical Prince compositions but are terrific nonetheless. "Horny Toad" has the beat and guitar twang that might land a song on the country charts. "4 the Tears in Your Eyes," previously available only on "We Are the World," is surprisingly deep, exploring Prince's Christian beliefs. In "Hello," Prince takes a rare shot back at his critics. However, these aberrations are scarce. The majority of the set consists of the dance songs that made Prince famous.

These songs are famous because they're brilliantly written. Synthesizers mix with percussion, guitars, and layered vocals to form a perfect union of harmony and rhythm. This masterful mix compels even non-dancers to stand up and do a two-step.

A great number of people don't buy Prince albums because they think he is just too nasty for their tastes. But Prince is a song writing genius not to be ignored just because of his grooming habits. His music appeals to anyone who is willing to give it a try. These albums provide the perfect opportunity to get to know this enigmatic monarch. Discs one and two are available separately. Each disc contains 75 minutes of music, so it's certainly a lot of sound for the money.

Anyone who likes Prince at all should go ahead and spend fifty bucks on the boxed set. It provides an anthology of the



The former Prince demonstrates that, whatever he may choose to be called, his greatest hits always will sound the same.

best music Prince ever made, and it's a lot less expensive than buying all of Prince's albums.

One point becomes painfully clear as you listen to the entire set: Prince was at his best over the last years of his career. This fact makes his retirement seem foolish and even tragic.

However, Prince's former tour man-

ager Alan Leeds, who wrote this album's liner notes, offers a glimmer of hope for the disheartened fan. Leeds believes that Prince's retirement was only a retirement of the Prince persona and that even better music is on the way from whomever or whatever the former Prince might choose to become.

One can only hope.

JOHN NEIMAN

Album Review
Prince The Hits
A+

Boo Radleys' Latest Fulfills Much of Their Early Promise

When England's Boo Radleys released their debut album *Everything's Alright Forever* last year, critics unfairly tagged them as yet another "shoegazer" band. The Radleys actually broke from the typical shoegazer formula of layer upon layer of distorted guitar riffs by employing different horns and strings to flesh out their

sound. But the net result was unremarkable since many of the songs became bogged down in the instrumental morass.

But one song from *Forever*, "Does This

Hurt", indicated the Radleys' sizable potential, with its wondrous orgy of guitar chatter and hypnotic beats.

The Radleys second album *Giant Steps* is a substantial improvement. Several of the songs are effortless pop gems, enhanced by diverse instrumentation and sensible lyrics. "Wishin' I Was Skinny" and "I Hang Suspended" are particular standouts. On "Skinny," the Radleys use a wistful melody to belie the speaker's desire for the whole world, which for him consists of a single girl. "Suspended" has a surprisingly steady rhythm that is punctuated by a muscular guitar lead.

Not all of the songs on *Steps* work, though. The flanged psychedelia on such tunes as "Thinking of Ways" is quite annoying. "Butterfly McQueen" starts off well enough with a tight reggae bass line, a nifty flamenco guitar note and wispy vocals but then disintegrates into a whiny voice over some freak-out guitar.

Still, *Giant Steps* sees the Boo Radleys fulfilling much of their potential. They have an unquestionably great album in them but they need to figure out what works and what does not. The Boo Radleys need only take a few more giant steps before they release their masterpiece.

MERRETTE MOORE

Album Review
Giant Steps
B

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