

Latin Singer Delivers Show With True Rock Star Force

By JENISE HUDSON
Staff Writer

Alejandro Escovedo began his show with the saunter of a pretentious serenading musician.

But as he strapped on his baby blue electric guitar, the musician and his accompanying band proceeded to rock the crowd with their fiery tunes.

He began "Everybody Loves Me, But I Don't Know Why" in a smoldering tenor, later growing to possess the passion associated with Latin singers, delivered with the hard-core edge of rock singers.

The same balance of passion and ruggedness could be seen in the way Escovedo played each song. He and his backup singer ripped down their electric guitars in a series of raging chords. When the guitarist forcefully ripped out "Castanets," it became clear that

Escovedo's music focuses just as much on instrumentals as it does on vocals.

Escovedo's smoky voice and fevered playing were also backed by the soaring sounds of cellos, harmonica and frantic drum beats. Their voices cut through the hectic interlude with smooth precision.

Showcasing the individual talent of his band members, Escovedo's set leapt from song to song with one instrument soaring above the others. While his renegade anthem, "Everybody Loves Me, But I Don't Know Why" highlighted his skill as a guitarist, in "Five Hearts" the cello gracefully rose above Escovedo's voice in gentle harmony. But the drummer's incessant pounding in "Rosalie" did more to annoy than set a good rhythm.

But the few shortcomings of his band weren't enough to overshadow the liveliness of Escovedo's performance. With unadulterated force he tore up the stage in true rocker's fashion — and the crowd never complained.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.



Alejandro Escovedo
GO! Rehearsal Studios
Saturday, Dec. 1
★★★★☆

Strokes Almost Live Up To Hype, Prove Talent

By BRIAN BEDSWORTH
Senior Writer

It must be good to be the Strokes. They make rock music seem so easy, and make it look so good.

Rarely does a band have to do so little to fill the Cat's Cradle and then drive the crowd to hysterics. The throngs of screaming fans clawing at the stage seemed to be exerting more energy than the Strokes, who lackadaisically swagged through their short set as the crowd begged for more.

In case you haven't been caught up by the shameless media hype, the Strokes are the current "it" band. A quintet of elegantly scruffy New York hipsters, the group sells out shows everywhere, elicits Beatlemania responses from female fans, and makes rock critics gush messianic comparisons.

They've been called "the saviors of rock," "the fairy-tale rock group who awoke a sleeping rock scene" and other ridiculous hyperbolic proclamations. Their debut album, *Is This It*, released in

September, is flying off record store shelves as I type.

With all that in mind, I went to the Cat's Cradle prepared to be thoroughly disappointed. There's no way they can be that good, I thought. In a way I was right, but in a way I was wrong.

Try as I might, I can't deny that the Strokes are a good rock band. They've got solid songwriting, killer riffs and super-catchy hooks in their bag of tricks, and they were using them all Tuesday night. Musically, they were on.

They precisely barreled through *Is This It*'s 11 songs pretty much in the order they appear on the album, opening the set with the record's sleepy-eyed title track. Their live show was a faithful reproduction of the album — damn good, straight-up rock songs in the vein of their New York predecessors Velvet Underground and Television. The crowd was visibly excited; dancing and jumping up and down in a show of enthusiasm that's not been seen in Chapel Hill for years. Female fans were screaming and pushing people in front of them to claw at frontman Julian Casablancas (the son of Elite Modeling founder John Casablancas).

But the Strokes looked like they'd

rather be anywhere else. The rest of the band melted to the back of the stage to give Casablancas room for his huge rock persona. The star of the Casablancas show stood hunched over the mike in the same spot for the first few songs, barely raising his head, doing a bad impersonation of a lame drunk. Occasionally he'd bend over the edge of the stage to let fans touch him.

"I hope everybody's having a good time," he told the crowd at one point. "We are even though we don't look like it."

Toward the end of the set the band decided to pick it up and actually put on a show. But even that seemed artificial. At one point Casablancas poured beer on himself, at another he fell down and sang from the floor. The moves made the girls scream a little louder, but he seemed to be doing them because he was aware it was necessary. That's rock.

The Strokes ended the set with the anthem "Take it or Leave it." By that point Casablancas and bandmates had woken up a bit and were actually moving onstage. But again, the sense that it was an act detracted from the emotion. And then it was over.

At the end of the song the Strokes quickly left the stage, the lights came up, and non-Strokes music started playing over the PA. Very anti-climatic.

But you know what? It doesn't matter because even though they might have put on a lousy show, you will still like the Strokes. You can't help it. Their hooks are too catchy. Their denim and leather too hip. Their faces everywhere.

Oh yes. It must be good to be the Strokes.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.



The Strokes
Cat's Cradle
Tuesday, Nov. 27
★★★★☆

Mississippi Allstars Light Fire Underneath The Blues

By ELLIOTT DUBE
Staff Writer

The North Mississippi Allstars began their set with a musical explosion, and they had no trouble in keeping the fire raging for the rest of the night.

Cody Dickinson's rampaging drum work was the first sound to come from the band. Chris Chew strengthened the rhythm with his fat, popping bass notes, and the beast of blues was awakened.

Deep and dirty hill-country music marched along and growled like a wild animal — the band was relentless, crackling with energy.

And the crowd felt it. While they danced, bounced and shook to Dickinson and Chew's beats and thumps, they were wowed by the scintillating guitar work of Luther Dickinson

and Dwayne Burnside. The show's energy hit a number of peaks whenever the Allstars decided to let the spontaneity of jamming take over.

Unlike some other jam bands, the Allstars never descended into self-indulgence. With every change in tempo and key, the band dove into a powerful new blues-rock groove. Every note of its mid-song explorations had a purpose, leading seamlessly into another song.

At one point, after several jam-heavy minutes, the band segued into "Skinny Woman" without skipping a beat; there were many moments where the band seemed to transcend individual song structure and hit upon something pure. The music moved quickly from sizzling to cool, from sinister to heavenly.

Which proved the blues have a powerful ally in the North Mississippi Allstars. The old bluesmasters won't be

around forever, and the music needs young talent to keep it thriving.

The Allstars kept it pumping on Saturday night, and their fiery, spiritual energy allowed the blues to truly thrive.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.



North Mississippi Allstars
Cat's Cradle
Saturday, Nov. 1
★★★★★

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