

Playing with confidence, Sonic Youth blows 'em out in Cat's Cradle concert

A mentality exists in this world which I have yet to understand fully. It began in the urban areas of Europe, spread to the United States in a sometimes altered and intellectual way, and exists in the town of Chapel Hill most notably among the middle-class, well-educated teenage children of university professors.

The mentality is expressed by these high school students in their dress — black leather, chains and unisex eyeliner — and their attitude — a posture of indifference and pretentiousness toward the rest of the world, supposedly because of some perceived notion of oppression.

The mentality is expressed in music by rock groups who have become known for their blaring guitars, screaming vocals and absence of musical variation in terms of emotional intensity or decibels, which remain at peak levels through performances.

Such a rock group is Sonic Youth, in the midst of a U.S. tour to hock their new album *Sister*. The band played Tuesday night to a Cat's Cradle audience bursting with high school students outfitted with eyeliner and bad attitudes.

Perhaps the best thing about the Youth is that they know exactly what they are doing and do not pretend to be doing otherwise. The name

Rob Sherman

Concert

Sonic Youth implies music that emphasizes loud sound and adolescent audiences.

The unadulterated power of the electric guitar is stressed in the band's publicity too, and the group certainly has captured that power in its music. From the opening song, the Youth created an amazing intensity level which showed no signs of lessening at 1 a.m. (Ever wonder how these kids get their parents to let them stay up so late on a school night?)

Surprisingly, this was not the kind of music that inspired dancing in the audience. Not that music has to inspire physical movement to be good, but sometimes people dance (slam, really) to music that is in no way danceable. Perhaps the audience was too tightly packed in front of the stage.

The band made a name for itself with its last album, *EVOL* ("love" spelled backward), which became a favorite of critics and college radio stations.

Members Lee Renaldo and Thurston Moore (who looks a bit like a

Mouseketeer gone bad) have taken to unconventional tunings of their guitars, as well as sticking screwdrivers in the strings, and hitting them with broken bottles and drumsticks.

A few times, Moore appeared to use parts of the stage to play his guitar. Hard to tell from the back though. He could have been stretching.

The lyrics were, well, unintelligible for the most part. The vocals were used more to add to the energy level and musical character than to communicate anything intelligent.

Kim Gordon, who is a beautiful woman in a tired and depraved kind of way, sang a majority of the songs, and her vocals ranged from a low moaning to a shrill screaming, depending on who-knows-what kind of rationale.

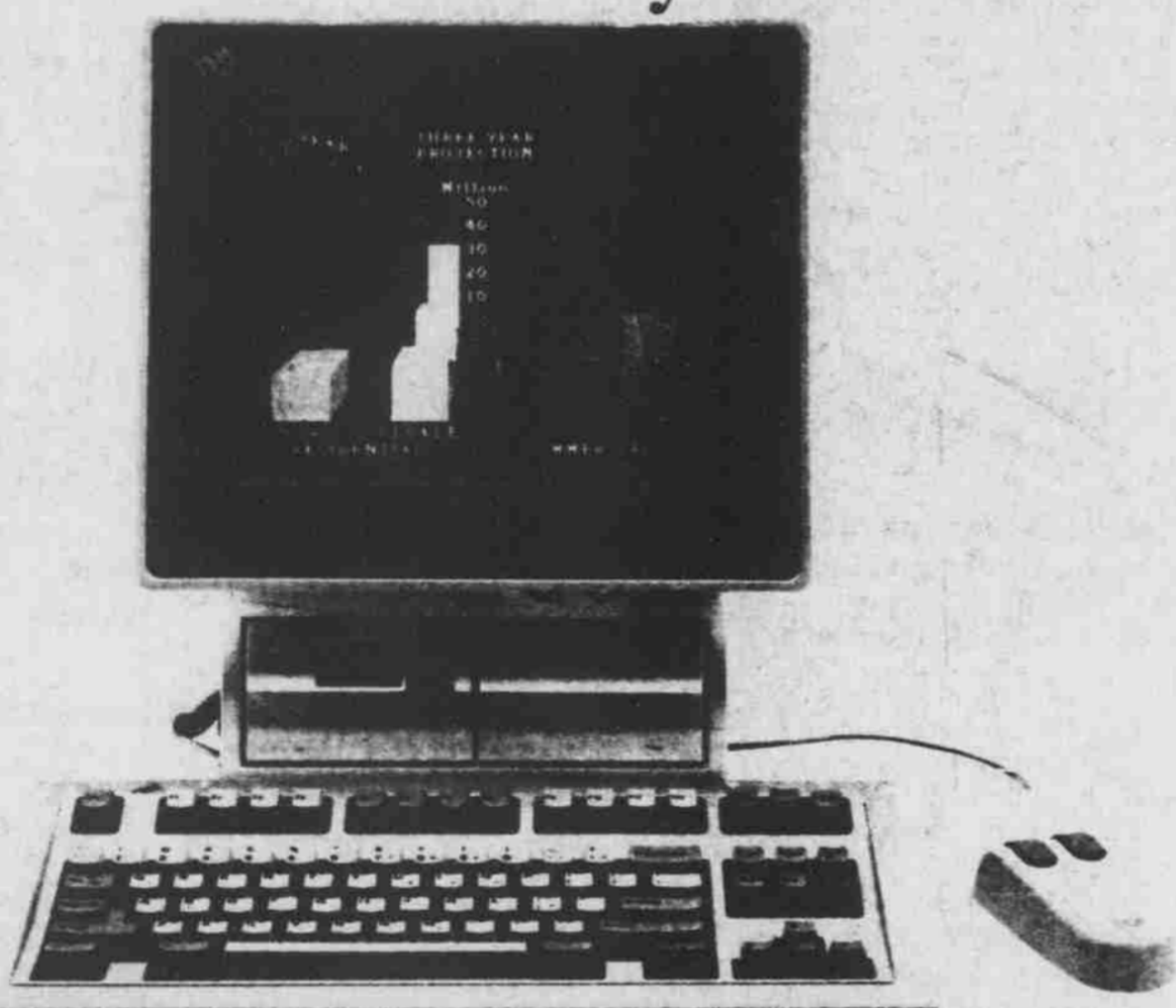
Songs that the Youth played between 12:15 and 1 a.m. included "Top Violence," "White Cross," "Cotton Crown," and "Stereo Station."

All things considered, the concert seemed to be a success. It's hard to tell. Judging the music for what it intends to do, which is basically to express a constancy of energy and rage, Sonic Youth is a fine group of accomplished rock musicians.



Sonic Youth, left to right: Steve Shelly, Lee Renaldo, Thurston Moore, Kim Gordon

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