

# GUNS N' ROSES, THE CULT, SOUL ASYLUM, BLIND MELON

The National Bowl, Milton Keynes  
Saturday, May 29

## BLIND MELON



IT'S HARD to imagine a band making less impact than Blind Melon did. Apart from the throng at the front, the air of apathy that greeted their set was so underwhelming, it could have been described as 'almost intangible' – if anyone could be bothered.

To me, the best bits of the 'Melon album sound like ultra chilled-out Jane's Addiction – which is fine late at night – but on a grey afternoon in Milton Keynes, the best bits of the set were always gonna be the last bits.

## SOUL ASYLUM



EASILY THE most exciting band on the stage today, the planet, even.

It's all happening a little late for Soul Asylum. At least six albums into their career with 'Grave Dancers Union' and their hardcore following is accusing them of selling out. But if selling out is sounding like Ted Nugent overseeing Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers' early albums – and they do – then I wanna buy some.

Soul Asylum rock for real. Okay, today they don't segue Marvin Gaye's 'Sexual Heeling' into 'Jessica' by the Allman Brothers (you want weird? They did the night before...), but 'Grave Dancers...' is a stunner by any yardstick and they play most of it here like their lives depend on it.

Daniel Murphy's guitar is a wild and crazy thing. Grant Young and Karl Mueller hit their drums and bass like amplification is a thing of the future. And Dave Pirner is a thing, er, well, he's a thing that's a bit out of it, probably. After introducing 'Runaway Train' not a little sardonically as Soul Asylum's 'November Rain', he precludes 'Without A Trace' with the speech: 'I hope y'all like it, but frankly I don't give a f\*\*k whether you like it or not...'. Okay, but I liked it just fine, Dave.

A couple of tracks from 'Hang Time', 'Down On Up To Me' and the sublime 'Sometime To Return', hurtle into '99%'. Then in a howl of feedback, they're gone. Brilliant. If only they could have had all the PA...

## THE CULT



IS IT just me or have The Cult gone a bit silly?

So they're back as a five-piece – Ian Astbury and Billy Duffy now being backed by ex-Mission man Craig Adams (bass), Mike Dimkitch (guitar) and Scott Garrett (drums) – and they look like they mean it. Adams and Dimkitch certainly appear to be fully paid-up members of Headbangers Inc, but will they be there in 12 months time?

Duffy's still got it, but no matter how many times Astbury twirls his mike or says 'f\*\*k', I can't help standing in the drizzle and thinking

like a once-great band halfway through a farewell greatest hits tour. When you've got hits like 'Li'l Devil', 'Fire Woman' and 'Love Removal Machine', you'd be a fool not to play 'em, but are we supposed to take it seriously? The new songs are okay but not earth-shattering. Astbury assures us, sounding absolutely nothing like a parody of himself (!?), that 'Starchild' is 'pop-ticious'. Another newie, early in the set, contained a lyric which sounded like, 'You're 17, you're wasted, you can't even f\*\*k'. Interesting. But not as interesting as Duffy's haircut.

The Cult will be playing 42 dates in 18 counties before the year is out. This one went down a storm with the crowd. But taking my cue from the weather, I'd have to say that, for me, they were more of a shower.

## GUNS N' ROSES



AXL ROSE flew in by helicopter at 8.10pm. He walked to a big black Range Rover which whisked him backstage 20 minutes before Guns N' Roses took the stage. When they did, the Milton Keynes Bowl erupted.

The roar was as surprising as it was loud – not only because everyone had been drenched by pouring rain for well over an hour, but also as the age of the audience suggested its collective voice would have been something much more akin to a squeal.

The 'Skin N' Bones' six-piece line-up (including, of course, and for five shows only, one Izzy Stradlin) promised much – and delivered only slightly less. But I'm a fussy git and I'd have liked more. I'd have liked the fire and all-hell's-breaking-loose shit-kickin' enthusiasm of 1988 Donington's set.

But the band have grown and matured since that first time I saw them and they now present a well-paced and measured show. The opening seven-song salvo is awesome. I still think they've a long way to get close to Wings' original 'Live And Let Die', but Duff sings The Misfits' 'Attitude' with enough attitude to spare. It's nice, too, when an unusually-quiet-between-numbers Axl apologises that he has no one to bitch about before 'Double Talkin' Jive', grinning whilst mumbling about getting in the ring with an olive branch.

It's probably a lot more spontaneous than it sometimes looks, but it never gets near the edge of danger. Instead, they leave sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll behind and get closer to Art, with the piano-led 'November Rain'. I have to admit, this now sounds like something Very Special Indeed.

The acoustic set is great, too. After the last chords of '...Jive' echo away, the darkness of the stage cannot hide an army of munchkins bringing on a soddin' great sofa. The band drape themselves over it, with Axl – in overmuch baggy white shorts plus fire-engine red baseball cap and Charlie (Manson) Don't Surf T-shirt – predictably putting his feet on the upholstery just like everyone told him he shouldn't. Slash boosts 'You're Crazy' with his Gibson, but these five songs are just mellow-type shit. The end of 'Patience' is maimed by Slash's nails-on-a-blackboard attempts at John Lennon's 'Imagine', but hey... this is supposed to be dangerous rock 'n' roll and 'Knockin' On Heaven's Door' is just as much a show-

## GN'R setlist

1. NIGHTRAIN
  2. MR BROWNSTONE
  3. LIVE AND LET DIE
  4. WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE
  5. ATTITUDE
  6. IT'S SO EASY
  7. DOUBLE TALKIN' JIVE
  8. YOU AIN'T THE FIRST
  9. YOU'RE CRAZY
  10. USED TO LOVE HER
  11. PATIENCE/IMAGINE
  12. KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR
  13. NOVEMBER RAIN
  14. DEAD HORSE
- drum solo**
15. YOU COULD BE MINE
- Slash solo**
16. SWEET CHILD O' MINE
- Encore: PARADISE CITY**

(Tracks 8-12, in *italics*, were played as 'acoustic numbers'.)

impact wanes through the drum and guitar solos. 'You Could Be Mine' is a relief after the former and 'Sweet Child O' Mine' could do no wrong as a set closer after the latter.

The encore is swiftly delivered and bows dutifully taken with Izzy, still looking embarrassed by the great reception he got when namechecked by Axl earlier. But the real stars tonight are the 60,000 of you who stood in the rain. I still think ya deserve better. Sunday, you apparently got it. But tonight, I reckon Guns N' Roses had more than they gave – but maybe we'll have to wait to a back-to-the-bar(n)s tour to really see just how much... NEIL JEFFRIES



AXL ROSE