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Indie Rock, Summer 99

The best rock show I saw this summer, and the best one I ever saw, was Shellac. The loudest rock show I saw this summer, and the loudest one ever, was Guided by Voices. I drank the most beer at Pavement, because a friend of mine, J, was working the bar that night and I would give her a twenty for four beers and she would give me back twenty in fives and coin. The biggest disappointment was Matmos, because they didn't have the beats live they do on their record. The most male-feminist indie rock boy mindfuckingest was seeing Jeff Tweedy in Chicago, throwing his pearls before the frat boy swine of Wicker Park. Tweedy threw such pearls as a nice rant at an American feminist group for banning his album.

Indie rock has a nice aged feel to it—you go to shows now expecting to see people in their thirties, as well as the twenty-somethings who got into Pavement when they were teenagers. It's more surprising—as I was at a Shellac show in August—to see late teens, curvaceous & made-up punkettes, who think Action Park is an amazing album.

Action Park was Shellac's first album. Shellac is Steve Albini's band. Albini is the engineer-auteur of grunge and indie rock—through producing (as he doesn't call it) albums by Nirvana, PJ Harvey, the Breeders, Smashing Pumpkins, Killdozer, Palace. He is a scrawny guy in faded phys. ed. t-shirt, and the biggest wallet you've ever seen sticking out of his bony-ass back pocket. The first song they played was "Canada"—this on the first show of their first Canadian tour. Nice synchronicity, but Albini has also said in the past that he hated Canada and Canadian smugness. The band kicked into "Canada" with no countdown, with a hard-edged mechanical-industrial precision that impressed all of my noise-playing friends. One, Luke, who lives in my building, is an indie rock dj, and plays in bands and with tape machines and is a waiter. At the Guided by Voices show a month earlier Luke swooned, singing along with Bob Pollard as if he was a Mouseketeer and Pollard was Annette Funicello. Luke was at the Shellac show but hated it, resenting the veneration he felt in the room for Albini as godfather of the scene.

My favourite line in "Canada" is "imagine a time when your cigar was ironic"—a convoluted and as precise criticism of gentrification as should ever be in rock. You just have to know Chicago, and the way old working class neighbourhoods around the Loop are being transformed into cigar and martini, to know what the fuck Albini's talking about here. Shellac did absolutely nothing extra, as a band, than was required to make certain noises we sometimes call rock—and they made the noises with such energy that Albini's body seemed to be in a permanent angry arc, curving toward the audience with the muscular fierceness of a fireman hauling hose.

I saw Guided By Voices in 1996 when they played at Music West, a local industry and fan conference. At that show, after about five songs the band just took requests for the rest of the night, including mine, "14 Cheerleader Cold Front". They were like a human juke box. I couldn't believe it. It was great. At GBV's show this past summer, they played very loud. They had huge speakers etc. All that stuff. I stood at the

very front of course. I like the ear-tugging, ear bleeding effect of a good loud show in a small club. And the next day, I had a meeting about this teaching I'm doing, and I had to pull up my chair about six inches from the woman talking to me because I couldn't hear, until like 2 p.m. Trying to like memorize things I couldn't hear because I couldn't write, my hands were shaking.

Matmos, well Matmos was another piece of work. Matmos is a San Francisco gay hard techno band that does theory music as well as fisting soundtracks. They sound like great 808 State remixes, and have titles that quote Duke University Press, which is all you need to know about them.

All of these bands are also very good on their latest releases. GBV benefits from Ric Ocasek's car stereo approach: "Liquid Indian" and a song about a heaven of "softer tits" ensure this facet of anti-pc indie rock continues to thrive, while Pavement's classic 70s sound and true soft noise collage make them forever listenable. Shellac crunches when it cracks. Their song "House of Garbage" makes me think of my place, playing music loud enough that the rotting floor acts like a drumskin. Wilco's album, *Summerteeth*, narrates male wandering—or its fantasy—and violence with the precision of a tire gauge. When I saw Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, he did a great rock star turn, castigating *No Depression* magazine for not liking his music. A woman told him to "shut up and play," he said "good night" and walked off stage (he'd played for about an hour then) & people yelled out they were "sorry" and "she's a bitch" and she looked faux-mortified. He came back out—smoking a cigarette—spared some more with her & played for another hour.

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