REVIEWS

SATURDAY

Pig Iron enjoy a surprisingly strong attendance for a performance that starts at the (relatively) ungodly hour of 12 noon. The band sound intense and plodding in a good way, with some blistering vocals from Johnny Clyde – and some great harmonica playing from him, too. The brooding, Southern rock-flavoured Cast Kill The Pain makes a fine ending to a fine set.

Watching **Dumpy's Rusty Nuts** is like being in London's old Marquee club on a wet Tuesday night 25 years ago – it's all meandering guitar solos from the decrepit-looking Dumpster, and a set packed full of witless mutilations of old rock'n'roll standards. To follow, Paul Gentry, lead singer of **The Glitterati**, looks like the son of Gary Holton – and there are certainly some hooligan, Heavy Metal Kids-style elements to the band's trashy punk approach... If you concentrate really hard. But as the set goes on each song – be it new release Fight! Fight! Fight! or Overnight Superstar – begins to sound like The Knack on steroids.

Marseille's set is hampered (as it always has been) by a lack of quality material. Be it an oldie like Rock You Tonight or a new 'un like Are You Ready, the band's songs are trite and average at best. It's also discomfiting to see them portray themselves as NWOBHM legends, because that's a claim without foundation.

Girlschool overcome some early problems with Enid Williams' bass to deliver an excellent performance. Highlights include a rollicking version of Take It All Away – a song introduced by guitarist Kim McAuliffe as "the first song we recorded all those years ago... but we still remember it – I hope." Today's is an ageless display, with Enid in particular looking hot in her uniform of leather or rubber (or possibly both). At the end of Race With The Devil a grubby-looking pair of men's underpants is thrown on stage [You can't take that Dom Lawson anywhere – Ed]. Torn bones, eat your heart out. Our only criticism? Great Girlschool's gritty, down-to-earth approach, Jackie Chambers' gleaming Flying V-style guitar looks a bit out of place. Still, she could always sell it to Steel Panther.

Stepping gamely around any technical obstacles, **Tigerlily** are indecently entertaining today. Well-drilled and far heavier than they sounded 20 years ago, they end with a scalp-lifting version of Ace Of Spades and go down an absolute storm.

Per fans looking for some hard rock (as opposed to heavy metal) at Hard Rock Hell, **Quireboys** are a godsend. No pointy headdocks, no lyrics about castles, demons or wizards – just an hour of uproarious Jhenkie Miller-fronting-The-Faces-covering-Slade-I-rock'n'roll that makes this writer realise that even we on CR don't take fans seriously enough.

Elixir turn out to be the surprise NWOBHM package of Hard Rock Hell. They have a fearsome twin-guitar attack – take a bow, Phil Denton and 'Storming' Norman Gordon – a blond giant of a frontman in Paul Taylor, and a soaring anthem in the form of Midnight Messiah. Why have they never been able to capture this live/wire spirit in the recording studio?

More NWOBHM genius comes forth in the shape of **Witchfynde**, with the amazing Montsarrat guitar. A mirthsome moment occurs when cutlier Bella (the best-named rock singer... ever) proclaims: "Mr Lars Ulrich said to me, when you got to Pinkpop you must play my favourite Witchfynde song." Which they do. "Twas Leaving Haste, of course – one of the great undiscovered NWOBHM classics.

Marya Roxx is a dead spit for Lauren Harris, who is due to perform later on in the day. On closer inspection, however, the Palomia born, California-based singer proves to be a fearsome, claws-out she-wolf – making Ally Harris look like a fluffy pussycat. Plus we get to hear a storming song called 2!!! "Get your whips out," Marya urges at one point. Yeah... but only if you put the handcuffs away, dear. Otherwise things could get decidedly dangerous.

With plenty of bands proving that reunions don't have to be tired and cynical affairs, the not exactly legendary **Hammerhead** could have triumphed here, but instead they barely manage to coast their way through an amiable but thrill-starved set of NWOBHM-meet'n'potatoes, their collective mojo visibly and audibly malnourished. A few loyal fans generously punch the air in support, but it's hard to fathom what younger, less misty-eyed punters must be thinking.

Angel Witch spearhead a third NWOBHM triumph, with the enduring Kevin Heybourne guiding his troops through classic after classic. Naturally, the set climaxes with the rousing crowd-participation chant of: "You're an Angel Witch, you're an Angel Witch..." We would've been stunned if it hadn't! And who was that guy on bass? Will Palmer, manager of Cathedral, that's who. Or as a Cathedral-member-who-shall-remain-nameless whispered to us, "Will! Yeah, his mum is in EastEnders."

Rogue Male make a credible if somewhat shambolic return. Frontman Jim Little-Snow basically (after Ban Jacquified) is still angry... albeit in the manner of a belligerent neighbour who doesn't like you parking your car across his drive. Old chestnuts like Take An Shit and Rough Tough (Pretty Bad) might've been strung out for all they were worth, but newie Dangerzone gives the set a boost, and Dizzy Motorcycle – their most recognisable song – is a decent enough climax.

W.A.S.P. no popular consensus, are the band of the festival. Blackie Lawless, huntsman bracelets and all, has still got it – in spades – and rolls back the years with a blistering display. Wild Child, I Wanna Be Somebody, The Real Me... what a relief it is to hear these old stingers delivered with power, passion and, yes, credibility. Blackie – who these days resembles the Bride Of Chucky dressed up like Alice Cooper – is in total control, even urging the audience to "SHHHHH" at one stage. You could hear a studded codpiece drop. After a succession of slam-bang standards, The Idol Drawn 1992's The Crimson Idol) and Take Me Up (from 2007's Dominator) provide a relatively mellow change of pace. But before long the sacrificial-lamb frenzy begins all over again, and the set ramps up to a close with Blind In Texas. While many of his peers may be creaking into retirement, Blackie shows he can still deliver.

Queensrÿche's headlining set looks destined to pass into rock festival folklore, but for all the wrong reasons. Kicking off with three tracks from American Soldier and making everyone wait for a full half an hour before playing anything from Empire would have been a gamble worth taking if this was their own show, but this is a festival crowd and the lack of hits swiftly takes its toll as the venue begins to empty. Given how W.A.S.P. ripped the place apart with hits galore moments earlier, it seems ludicrous that the Seattle veterans can't even bring themselves to play anything from Operation: Mindcrime. We do get Silent Lucidity and Empire, but for all Geoff Tate's smug sneering and bizarrely flamboyant stage moves, few people here seem bothered. Shame.

There are no such concerns with **New York Dolls**, who are not just the loudest band of the weekend but also one of the most relentlessly entertaining. Having skilfully established this new line-up with two excellent studio albums, the death-cheating veterans have little to prove and could easily have trotted out the obvious hits with lazy contempt, but there is real vitality and verve passing and flowing from the PA speakers as classics like Trash and Pills twist spit with newer, similarly priapic material. David Johansen still looks like a shrink-wrapped Mick Jagger and his voice remains a thing of nasal-yet-beaten wonder, as Sylvain Sylvain's six-string street poetry rebounds around the auditorium. If rock'n'roll is about feeling good, the New York Dolls are very much fit for purpose, and Hard Rock Hell is reaping the benefits of some good goddamn cheapo.

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