

SAPPY TIMES

Sunday

August 2, 2009

People are falling asleep inside the Vogue Theatre. Usually this would be a sign that things are not well, that things are bad & boring; but on the second day of Sappyfest number four the drooping heads and weary eyes are a sign of the opposite thing. What a day, what a day, what-a-day! What a day, loolalay, hurray! On this long Saturday we have heard so many chiming choruses, so many bass-drum booms, so many singings of the words "so" and "love". We have seen such a string of thrills. And so now in this humid cinema, past midnight, we slip in and out of dream. It's a twilight, on stage. Or it's sunrise. The *EXIT* signs are the colour of dawn through the trees. Twice, Phil Elverum says, "Can I get a little more fuzz, please?" Only once does he ask for less.

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Misc:

- It's okay that Julie Doiron seems to be in every band.
- Did I just see a guy with a *Breast Inspector* t-shirt?
- Has anyone here ever opened a store called *Snackville*?

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Things are easy and the sky is clear but Jon-Rae Fletcher is singing in his raincloud voice that things are *hard*. His

trombone-player has the look of a trombone-player who specializes in lullabies. Fletcher declaims change, love, striving and despair. He stirs us up. Yet in the end it's Darcy Hancock's straining golden howl of a guitar solo that *proves* things are hard, that shows us indisputably that it is so, that teaches us how rough it is to want.

Snailhouse do something different. They play as many as five new songs and it is a little like five new ships coming in. These ships have travelled many miles and now they glitter in the summer. On "Sentimental Gentleman", the guitar solo is about introducing us to someone nice.

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I pass two girls with shoulder-length brown hair. They are about 11 years old. The first, in a Sackville Skating Club jacket, reassures the other: "Everybody who does Sappyfest is cool." I feel a bloom of pride.

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At the Vogue Theatre in the early evening. A film is on the screen and two accordionists are narrating. Most of the narration is in the form of accordion music. It is very nautical. Sometimes they use words to tell us what we are seeing: "Captain Bill Cook!" & "That's me!" The best is

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near the end, when they say, "Lobsters squiggling on the deck!" My smile is squiggling on my face.

Much later, Misha Bower takes the stage to tell us a story. She tells it as someone else, as an older woman called (I think) Georgia. The story is about soulmates, fights, honey, distances. It is full-figured, compelling, delicate, wise. It is almost morning and so easy to fall asleep; but when you open your eyes, Misha is here; she is telling true things.

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Sappyfest is also about laying in the grass. The sky is blue. The wind moves through the leaves. Music floats in from the stage but I am listening to the metal rings that attach the flags to their flagpoles. They sound like bells.

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Ladyhawk's words blur. The tent fills with a hundred yearnings. Our ears are *ringing* with so many yearnings. Our ears are also ringing because it is loud.

Hey, organizers! Listen up! Here is an idea for a concert at next year's Sappyfest: (1) Find a forest. (2) Air-drop Ladyhawk into the middle of it. (3) Light the forest on fire. Would you go to that show? Of course you would go to that show! Even if the forest-fire would kill you (it would kill you), you would go.

The first band I saw on Saturday were called the Suits. Their members didn't wear suits. None of them looked like they had ever been married or gone to a job interview. In fact, they looked about 12. But the Suits' "Dog-Walking Blues", a little folk-rock number with an off-kilter swing, was one of the best things I heard on all of the festival's second day.

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Because this is the final issue of Sappy Times, I will not get the chance to write about any of Sunday's

performances. Instead, here are some *predictions*:

- Thesis raps a really good analogy.
- Baby Eagle plays your favourite chord.
- Eric Chenaux distributes four-leaf clovers.
- The Luyas bring out a moodswinger.
- Destroyer knits a banner with la-la-la.
- Clues turn three audience members into diamonds.
- We all go home smitten.

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Mt Eerie's Phil Elverum, Julie Doiron and Fred Squire are playing *Lost Wisdom*, an album released last year. Even though these are sad, stricken songs, I am very, very happy. *Lost Wisdom* is one of my favourite records. I know the words. They ask us to sing along with lyrics that first came from Bjork: "*It's not meant to be a strife / it's not mea-a-a-ant to be a struggle / uphill.*" We in the Vogue do not quite sing along - we murmur. We seem to be asking ourselves if perhaps it *is* meant to be a struggle uphill. It seems that way, sometimes. Sometimes, it is hard.

At one point, Phil says: "My colours are white and clear." At another point, he sings about being a grey goose, of being a swan inside. At 1:52 am it becomes clear that there is a baby in the room. Why the heck is there a baby in the room? Who would bring a baby here? I twist around to find the culprit, to glower at the bad parents, the bad people, the *monsters*. They are probably busy getting ready to drive home drunk. But then I hear the baby again. It is singing! The baby is singing! With the music! The baby is warbling with the singing and howling with the guitar feedback! It is an abrupt, beautiful sound. Where is this genius baby? Where are its beautiful parents? Somebody give them a prize! Somebody kiss them on the mouth!

When we go out into the street, the stars are out. 🌠