



Camera, lights... Rock Action

The *Scottish Guitar Army* land in Spain for a frenzied assault on the senses

Barcelona Bikini · 12 May, 2001

(Published on www.doctormusic.com)

Mogwai have been described as the "best band of the 21st century" by alternative indie guru Stephen Malkmus and, judging by the reaction of the audience that fills the Bikini tonight, it seems that many are in agreement. Mogwai offer a complete live experience, a sonic attack on your senses, emotions and more immediately, on your ears. Speaking to the band during their soundcheck, guitarist Barry Burns warned us about this. "Volume's a good thing 'cos you can't tell someone how loud to put their stereo on but you can hurt their ears at a gig!" And, true to his words, the volume is at times almost painfully loud. Coupled with the band's crafted and dynamic experimentation into sound, the effect is immense.

This is only the beginning of a touring schedule which will keep the five-piece Glaswegian art rockers on the road for most of this year. "Rock Action", their most comprehensive album to date, transfers well to a live set-up, but as the band comment, "a lot of the songs are impossible to play without bringing a string section along with us." They are however accompanied by a cello player, who richly compliments their organic, melancholic sound. Multi-instrumentalist, Barry Burns also adds touches of flute and keyboards. Stuart Braithwaite adds his unimposing vocals to two tracks, "Secret Pint" and, in the absence of Super Furry Animal Gruff Rhys, "Dial: Revenge". They also include a number of older songs in their set, most notably "Like Herod" and "Xmas Steps".

The band, almost lost amongst minimal and atmospheric stage lighting, passionately attack their instruments to extract the most possible noise out of them. However, the beauty of Mogwai is the ever-changing dynamics and quiet, spatial melodies inevitably follow. Gentle strings play to a background of white noise, an effect that you can actually feel as well as hear. The instrumental interplay of three guitars, bass and drums is at times so emotionally charged and so dense that you wait for a break in the onslaught. When the tones drop down to a minimal murmur, the return of a crashing blanket of sound is all the more powerful. "We've made a lot of people leave some of the gigs!" they comment proudly. Mogwai are not for the fainthearted. Bassist Dominic Aitchison sums up their live shows in a few simple words: "It's instantaneous, you're into it or you're not". A quick look around the Bikini clearly proves Dominic right. The majority of the crowd are thoroughly transfixed, while a few can be seen beating a hasty retreat.