

The Tris McCall Report  
May 26, 2003

I tire of the rock thing. I'm not sure whether it's just me, but big guitar -- never a favorite of mine anyway -- is absolutely leaving me cold this season. Don't get me wrong; I've seen a bunch of good rock shows lately (yours included), but during this postwar malaise, I'm wondering what all the bombast is for.

In a sense, it's perfectly understandable. Performers follow applause, and applause follows the cultural mood. We're living through a particularly aggressive period, one where we're all inclined to cheer for wattage and muscle (backing the strong horse, as Osama Bin Laden succinctly put it), so a guy onstage with a Marshall and a bad attitude is going to get approbation. It's a tidal pull, and one we all feel. Even the members of the Beeps must sense it, and you've got to sympathize with their situation -- a fey bunch of Europeans and/or Europhiles playing distinctly European music at the most Europhobic moment any of us have ever lived through.

The Knitting Factory is the closest thing New York rockers have to The Hague, a little outpost of cool transatlantic chic in the un-rock neighborhood of Tribeca, and the Beeps looked relatively natural there. Maybe not 100% comfortable, sure -- but how could a group that sounds so much like Blue Wonder Power Milk-era Hooverphonic fit comfortably into a NYC indie rock scene dominated by big American guitars and even bigger American affrontery? The Beeps sport seven pieces: a conga player, a trombonist, a talented gremlin on the organ, bass and scratchy guitar, a jazzbo drummer, and a frontwoman/flutist who likes to run her vocals through spacy effects. If I couldn't make out the words in many of the songs, the cocktail lounge/spy movie collection of tropes was familiar enough to ground me. This is jetset (if not Jetset) music: James Bond and Swinging London, Geike Arnaert's brandy-stained Club Montepulciano, roulette wheels at Monaco, Europhilic sophistication, martini glasses, the whole brie-eating shebang.

They sold it. It would be inaccurate to say the crowd went wild, but a mook-like enthusiastic response isn't what The Beeps are after. They got an intellectual, appreciative reception, the kind that suggested attentive listening. It helped that the instrumentalists were all pretty ace. The frontwoman didn't articulate clearly enough for me, and I couldn't follow her narratives, but at least one song was about Paterson (a few of the Beeps are Europeans by way of Hudson County, I am told), so they win points there. I'm looking forward to my next opportunity to engage with their champagne-sipping, artful, shadow-of-the-Louvre project.

It's a huge mischaracterization to say that New York used to be crowded with bands like this -- for one thing, the musicianship in The Beeps is a good deal better than the crapola you used to get during the dreaded lounge revival -- but it is fair to say that during the Clinton years a nice percentage of city artists shared their multicultural aspirations. All the faux-globetrotting and NYLONosity was annoying for sure, but it wasn't anywhere near as destructive as the current fiction that NYC is Detroit. It isn't. We're supposed to be the nation's first line of defense against xenophobia, and it's about time our local cultural production regained some of its cosmopolitan sophistication.



Old Chelsea Station P.O.Box 1072 New York, NY 10013-1072  
[www.thebeeps.com](http://www.thebeeps.com)