

## Peter Murphy and She Wants Revenge in Toronto (Live Review)

Written by Chris Alexander

Friday, 25 November 2011 13:41

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Lee's Palace is a broom closet. Okay, maybe it was Tiger Stadium to me when I used to play live shows there in the 90's to half filled rooms, but man, art rock kingpin Peter Murphy deserves a bigger boat...

Still, when I dropped in to the venerable Toronto venue on Wednesday night to see Murphy—frontman of goth pioneers BAUHAUS and successful triple decade solo artist in his own right—shimmy his middle aged self across the cluttered stage, the intimacy of the decaying Lee's was more than rewarding. Murphy is currently touring in support of his new platter NINTH, and if you're a fan and you've heard new tracks like I SPIT ROSES or SEESAW SWAY, you're more than aware at just how damn good they are and, more importantly, how Murphy's craft as a songwriter and singer hasn't slipped. In fact, it may have even improved.

Shortly after 8 p.m., my wife (who lived through my heavy goth years with me and understands how much Murphy means to me) and I arrived to the packed to the back, sold out show. Another band was in progress and it wasn't the advertised opening act, dark-wave rock act SHE WANTS REVENGE. Rather, it was a glummy looking gaggle of scrappy kids onstage belting out some of the coolest, tightest post-punk new wave pop I've heard this century. The band's name is HUSSLE CLUB, from New York, and believe me, you want to know them. Delivering a solid set of sexy rock, they were cute, charming and wired to the teeth. Their energy was electric; shame that the Lee's lighting lads left them literally in the dark. Their sound was savage, and it would have been nice to actually see them a bit better. Anyway, I dropped five clams on their homemade demo CD. Here's hoping some savvy label sees them in action and signs them. A brilliant act, they are...

Next up was the central co-headliners/openers, California's SHE WANTS REVENGE: a well liked down tempo dark rock outfit, fronted by the charismatic Justin Warfield and backed by a band that this night were about as thrilling live as televised lawn bowling. Even co-founder/multi-instrumentalist Adam Bravin seemed distracted. SWR have some fantastic songs, and Warfield sells them hard with his monotone range (limited but stylized) and flamboyant hand gestures and skinny boy stage swagger, like an African American Mick Jagger. But whether it was the barely there geography of Lee's cramped stage or select members nerves or just posturing, the rest of the group's lack of energy made the set list—especially the second half—a bit of a slog. By the climax it was clear that the bulk of the audience wanted their hero to emerge.

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Murphy hit the stage shortly after 11pm to rounds of hysterical applause from the aging, but still attractive crowd. Murphy himself is in his 50's, hair thinning and skin lining, but his vampiric stature is still intimidating, sexy and badass. The veteran rocker, with his dynamite backing band, kicked in immediately to the melancholy and epic pop opera "All Night Long" from Murphy's second solo effort, LOVE HYSTERIA, and despite the initial wonk of the sound mix, as soon as Murphy opened his mouth and purred, any aural flaw was overlooked. His voice low, growling, sometimes gravelly something glorious, Murphy tore through the track and over the next 90 minutes, proceeded to own that tiny stage, darting back and forth, addressing the crowd close and near the back, riffing, engaging and holding the room in a taut thrall. And when Murphy blasted into the Bauhaus cover of Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust", pulling a screaming female fan out of the crowd and onstage, it was rock and roll.

Murphy's 1990 album DEEP is about as perfect a disc as you'll ever hear, bearing such essential tracks as "Deep Ocean, Vast Sea", the gorgeous and haunting "Marlene Dietrich's Favorite Poem", the sensuous "Strange Kind of Love" (which here was medlied with BAUHAUS' signature "Bela Lugosi's Dead", performed in its entirety at the beginning of Tony Scott's vampire classic THE HUNGER) and the anthemic chill of "Cuts You Up". Murphy plowed through them all, employing multiple guitars, electric violins and his own imposing delivery.

Here's a video I took, stage left of "Cuts You Up". Forgive the undynamic iPhone quality visuals, but listen to the sound, listen how good Murphy and company delivered the track.

{youtube}w1-FEboAw3c{/youtube}

And here is the 2nd half of "Marlene Dietrich's Favorite Poem", note the beauty of that violin:

{youtube}Ui0f3438EAg{/youtube}

Having all those bodies, each one honored to be there, jammed into the gloriously skeezy hole of a club, being that physically close to Murphy and seeing some fine bands (his disciples really), pave the way—stage size, be damned—it was one helluva night. If Murphy's NINTH tour (most dates are supported by She Wants Revenge) snakes its way to your area, don't be a fool, go and see it. Even if the promoters book him in a Starbucks, Murphy will *own* that damn

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