

live

on the overlap

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Fuck Buttons Photo: Stuart Green

Venn Festival

Various venues, Bristol

Somewhere between Rick Wakeman and *Butt* magazine (sorry Rick) we find **Matmos**, aka academic nerdfoxes M Schmidt, Drew Daniel, guest star J Lesser, and the treasure-trove of vintage synthesisers that provided raw material for current album *Supreme Balloon*. The Arnolfini is plunged into darkness as synths whoop, yelp, clank and make noises like an infant scribbling direct on your exposed brain with a light pen. Pure abstraction gets a synthenasia twist as visuals tumble by: a clip of Eighties gay porn where a man with a loaf-like perm jerks off in a Jacuzzi, and a rolling, fractal tunnel that I decide, in my tired and emotional state, is "the cosmic asshole". Makes sense, though. Even at their most avant, Matmos are never dry, always lubed; they fuck to theory, crunch numbers to porno, rewire human impulses like circuits cracked open and set about with solder.

Norway's **MoHa!** don't really impress on record, the energy of their two-man assault lost in the intricacy of their design and fucked-up production. Like all those Load bands, though, up close and personal on the floor of the Thekla, they fucking *jam*. The kit is a madman's dream of pristine kit, pedals, wires, sensors, and plastic Viking weaponry, backlit by halogen lamps and occasional strobe. Sometime Noxagt man Anders Hana darts between pounding his keyboard and speedily scraping across his guitar, sometimes in the same motion; drummer Morten J Olsen, meanwhile, is all spasmodic energy, his feet pounding on double drum sensors, drilling down on shattered cymbals, lithe and dynamic. As ever, the joy here is in seeing two young men exploring a maze of their own making, powering down secret passages and up sharp precipices. There's no chasing them, no pursuing them. They leave no trace and give no quarter. Just watch them go. (LP)

The Heads should be in the eye of a tour with Wooden Shjips by the time this mag 'hits' the 'streets'. People – especially old people – like writing about the latter band cos they can spaff on about their San Fran homestead and carrying the acid-rock freak flag and such. The Heads are from Bristol and, despite existing since the early Nineties without mainstream or even inkie press recognition, may nonetheless be the city's best-known psychedelic band. Lack of local ancestry notwithstanding, their set at the Thekla is a total nuke: loud and baked and unforgiving, tapped pedals detonating blitzkrieg like some Bond movie cliché. Blue Cheer minus the biker kudos aesthetic (which is great, but so is having your brains rocked out by unassuming dorks); Loop spying a sunbeam

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through the smoggy slate skies of the late Eighties; Fu Manchu forcibly relocated from their frathouse to an Avon flophouse built out of unsold Sixties free jazz. And further ultimately lacking reference scrabbling.

Some great individual moments during Berliner **Errorsmith**'s live set at Motion Skate Park, an early-morning highlight amid seven hours of exemplary electronic skull-rinsing. One such moment comes when Errorsmith, who's also 50 per cent of the duo Smith N Hack, violently shoves a too-curious member of *Plan B*'s reviewing team away from his equipment – in fairness, this was mainly for the *Three Stooges* snickerpuss factor, but still. Another moment arrives right after a brace of ravers shout at Errorsmith to "Play some proper techno!" – cue a velocity boost from no-fixed-pitch analogue wonkery to an immersive barrage of metallic panel-beating. There's a faint smile on his face for a second. The whole thing's a smash, though: if someone hasn't coined the term 'math-techno' yet, it's for the taking, but more pertinently, please distinguish this from the pine-floor minimal peddled by some of his Berlin semi-peers. The last great moment: making for the exit as Errorsmith packs away and receiving a dose of sobering daylight. (NG)

Of course it's special that erstwhile Bristolians and current **Fuck Buttons** Andy Hung and Ben Power are headlining the Saturday of Venn. But like rocket launches or hurricanes or suns collapsing, all Fuck Buttons gigs follow a similar drill. The ritual always begins with 'Sweet Love For Planet Earth', its starry twinkles spinning from the darkness, gradually succumbing to dawn-like drones. Nobody is dancing. It's always followed by the rippling, scary forest invocation of 'Ribs Out'. Nobody is dancing. But something is building, building through the thudding, crackling haze of 'Race You To My Bedroom – Spirit Rise', which comes at the point in the set it always comes. You couldn't do it differently, because if the order changed the spell wouldn't work. The primal rave of 'Bright Tomorrow' might not achieve its moment of molten catharsis, and the untitled last song wouldn't hit home in the way it does. It sounds like everything U2 ever did with a synth that was any good, filtered through itself, and blasted out in a roar of trancey light. At the end of the world there will only be sound. Everyone is dancing.

That said, the world does not in fact end. People are tired when they shuffle into Thekla the next evening. Everything is delayed, apparently because **Flying Lotus** needed to eat his tea. He deserved his tea. If new album *Los Angeles* is a dark, dank, semi-ambient wander through deserted hip-hop backstreets, then here Steven Ellison turns that stroll into pure carnivale. Beats are amped, playful and spry, keyboard muckarounds patter and fall, and though darkness lingers, it's flecked with joy. Ellison himself is almost supernatural: all the guy does is walk between electronic things with a mischievous grin on his face, but it's Venn's most charismatic turn, a sensei sleekly ghosting between his weapons. (AL)