

# The Heat Was Turned on High

Teresa Stolarskyj – *The Manitoban* – December 3, 2003

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"I think Winnipeg finally likes us!" an elated Steve Bays exclaimed at last Tuesday's Hot Hot Heat show at the Pyramid Cabaret. For the internationally acclaimed Victoria band, who in the last month returned from a European tour and were featured on both David Letterman and Conan O'Brien's late-night shows, cracking into the Winnipeg consciousness is a real accomplishment. Promoting their first full length, major-label release, *Make Up the Breakdown*, singer/keyboardist Bays, guitarist Dante DeCaro, bassist Dustin Hawthorne and drummer Paul Hawley tore through a set just shy of an hour.

Their sixth show in Winnipeg - and the first not considered by the band to be among the absolute worst of their career - was a sweaty display of neo-British Invasion rock, infused with a healthy dose of prog and punk. Bays, primed with an amazing set of lungs, was belting out frantic lyrics with hyper-rhythmic diction. He can work an audience while keeping a strong presence on the stage, moving with catlike stealth and power.

Fused with infectious songs such as "Get In or Get Out" and "Oh God Dammit," it's a wonder that the crowd was so polite. The house was packed, but for the most part, the extent of the audience's responsiveness despite the group's insistence on seeing some dancing was a mass effort at head-bopping. The group's international hit "Bandages" brought out more decidedly emphatic bopping, and even inspired at last some movement with the crowd toward something vaguely dance-like. It also brought the set to an abrupt, crashing close. The boys returned quickly to the stage for a two-song encore that was seemingly planned, but was both demanded and very necessary.

The night was filled with synthesizers and weird melodic noises, which all three of the night's bands made prominent use of; both openers did impressive work of warming up the necks of the head-boppers.

The Unicorns, decked out in pink, '50s-lounge-era, black collared suits, showcased some 45-minutes of absurdly random but compelling juxtapositions of melody and rhythm that is possibly best described as low-key, would-be ambient with a tinge of subdued darkness, all constructed on a '80s robotic-synth platform. The whole thing culminated with the bands almost neo-disco electronic rendition of Alice Cooper's "Tough Ghost."

Metric followed the Unicorns with their own 45 minutes on their last night of this Hot Hot Heat tour. The group's more driving melodies were tight; singer Emily Haines' candy-floss alto adeptly set off the darker melodic complexities. While clearly in their groove, the band came off with a surprisingly strong stage presence, though Haines occasionally seemed to be trying too hard to feign rock-star-chick. Nonetheless, the head-boppers of the crowd were either nearing peak form or else Metric really impressed them. Tunes like "Dead Disco" managed to rouse wild applause from the eager if somewhat subdued audience.

Hot Hot Heat's show at the Pyramid last Tuesday announced with certainty that rock n' roll has certainly not died; it merely went to hibernate awhile in western Canada. Ironically, Canada seems to be the only place where it remains hidden. With the roll the Hot Hot Heat is on, head-boppers across the nation will inevitably catch on soon.