



Beckett Warren (right) included some nice, inaccurate karaoke.

Migrating Migraines

An East Side trek with the West Side's Speak in Tongues brigade

by Ryan Smith

"If someone comes up with a stupid idea, we don't talk about it, we do it."

This is the cracked-brain objective of Razak Solar System as voiced by bassist Sean Carney, and an apt summation of the burgeoning Cleveland noise underground.

For years, this conglomeration of synaptic revolt has been centered around the nonprofit collective Speak in Tongues, where gangs of well-dressed, underpaid hipsters have gathered in the heart of Cleveland's reputed crack belt, near West 44th and Lorain, to have their frontal lobes flambéed. The venue has steadily booked local, national and even international bands specializing in every conceivable musical style as long as it's on the fringe. If hanging with homeless stragglers, using bathrooms conducive to maggot farming, sharing in the bring-your-own-beer policy and submitting to ear-shattering volume sounds palatable, the rewards will be well worth the discomforts. True, the stereotypical Speak in Tongues groupie

may appear aloof and smug, but that's exactly the attitude that the club is dedicated to disturbing with music that assaults calcified taste hierarchies.

Sometimes, the denizens of this underworld even break their own boundaries by migrating to other clubs. Last Thursday, three of the area's most promising and notorious acts left their West Side hole and traveled all the way across town to perform at the Grog Shop. Opener Beckett Warren traveled much further east than that. Back from a six-month hiatus in Oakland, Calif., the 22-year-old Lakewood native returned to showcase a handful of "classics" from his Speak in Tongues debut over two years ago. He must have done well while out West, because this natural born court jester began the show by throwing blank checks to everyone. Sporting a fresh moustache, baseball cap and beer belly, Beckett looked like an unemployed sports fan, but his sense of humor and musical style ranged somewhere between that of street poets Beck and Wesley Willis.

Offering the usual smorgasbord, including hilariously inaccurate karaoke takes on songs from Guns N' Roses and Black Sabbath, Beckett stumbled through

the Beastie-Boys-on-glue hits "Weed Crazy" and "Drinkin' + Stinkin,'" while his trademark "friends" (i.e. stuffed animals) fought with the human cast over stage rights. Though his songs rely on amateur beats, Beckett's real strength is the ability to spontaneously interact with the audience, a facet which came through when an encounter with a man sporting a bandana resulted in the dedication of an anal sex ballad. In fact, the only Beckett staple absent last Thursday was his fondness for nudity, a propensity he attributes to his high-school experiences.

"It started when a few friends would dance around at parties in conga lines, singing 'We ain't got no pants on,'" recalled Beckett after the show. "When we saw the reaction, we knew it was worth pursuing. Now, the belly and the moustache are easy sight gags, plus they get the girls wet and the guys mad."

If this musical comedy act strikes you as puerile, well, Razak Solar System followed Beckett to suggest stupid and smart aren't always so far removed from each other. Starting things off with two brand new songs, the trio reinforced their reputation of quicksilver evolution. Since the band formed in the summer of 1999, singer Steve Peffer, bassist Sean Carney and drummer Kevin Jawarsky have more than lived up to their potential by opening for the likes of such "avant" notables as the Flying Luttenbachers, Arab on Radar and the Make-Up, not to mention upcoming gigs with U.S. Maple and the Ruins.

Usually, Razak pummels the listener with melodic synth-rock compositions. On Thursday, however, the band displayed a new attack, with Carney and Peffer sharing double keyboard duties on the first song of the night, making their affinity for New Wave/punk textures even more apparent. The band relied less on Peffer's patented screaming and more on steering the structures towards complex, noisy states.

The least experienced band on the bill was Oblongata, made up of West Side teens. Despite their youth and the recent addition of a new singer, these five kids had no trouble terrorizing the audience with their brand of inhumanly precise grindcore/power violence. They specialize in songs hovering around the one-minute mark, but each one is jam-packed with hoarse shrieking and frenzied guitar proddings. In fact, the band has so much pent-up energy and rage, the players would continue to make their instruments sputter in between songs.

The audience for the preceding noise-rock performance wasn't large, but hey, Pere Ubu and the Electric Eels did no worse. Remember that you could do better the next time you gripe about the local scene. ■

WHAT'S PLAYING/WHAT'S SELLING

Top 10 spins on WMMS (100.7 FM) for Feb. 14-20:

1. Papa Roach, "Last Resort"
2. 3 Doors Down, "Loser"
3. Ozzy Osbourne w/Primus, "N.I.B."
4. Godsmack, "Bad Religion"
5. Perfect Circle, "Judith"
6. Godsmack, "Awake"
7. Fuel, "Hemorrhage in my Hands"
8. Offspring, "Original Prankster"
9. Perfect Circle, "3 Libras"
10. Sammy Hagar, "Let Sally Drive"

Top 10 sellers at Camelot Music (Rock Hall) for Feb. 14-20:

1. Beatles, *Beatles 1* (Capitol)
2. John Lennon, *Legend* (Capitol)
3. Jimi Hendrix, *Experience* (MCA)
4. Various Artists, *Concert for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame* (Columbia)
5. Various Artists, *Motown: The Classic Years* (Motown)
6. Bob Dylan, *Essential* (Columbia)
7. Various Artists, *Millenium Doo Wop* (Rhino)
8. Muddy Waters, *Best of Muddy Waters* (MCA)
9. Eric Clapton, *Cream of Clapton* (Polydor)
10. Beach Boys, *Greatest Hits, Vol. 1* (Capitol)