

October 5 - October 18, 1994

MAX

MUSIC NEWS XPRESS

Are we having fun yet?

Blase' Cabaret

The Tam O'Shanter
Boston, Ma.

Sunday night isn't normally a banner night for musical showgoing in Boston - that Blue law mindset dies hard. Not to mention that people are still sleeping off Saturday night and huddling under the ever-present lurking horror of Monday morning. It's a crying shame, therefore, that the Tam in Brookline should choose to book such a unique and exciting

band as Blase' Cabaret on just such a night. But to break into The Boston Scene you gotta pay the dues, and though Blase' has been around for several years now, they are only beginning what is certain to be a vertigo-inducing rise to recognition in Massachusetts.

Blase' Cabaret consists of four well-trained musicians: Nate Richardson on guitar and vocals, Ben Torrey on bass, Jon Babu on drums, and Jamie O'Neill on lead vocals and occasional keyboard work. While O'Neill's work on keyboards is integral to several tunes, his forte is as a front man and singer,

and for this reason Blase' might almost be considered a power trio with a front man, perhaps along the lines of the Spin Doctors.

Unlike the Spin Docs, however, these guys are almost progressive in their psychedelically warped, hard-edged funky art-rock compositions. There are very few simple creampuffs aimed at the charts here; compositions - complex ones at that - are their strong suit. The band has around 90 originals in their repertoire covering a wide variety of styles that have yet to be categorized (and a few you'll even recognize). Their changes and progressions are often non-standard and sometimes unbelievable, but almost always somewhere just inside the realm of accessibility. Perhaps they've been aided in this respect by the sudden popularity of unusual groups

like Phish and Aquarium Rescue Unit, and that crowd's appreciation for more interesting, mature music. Whatever the reason, the intimate fan clan at the Tam was digging the tunes, from the jazzily balladic *Kira* to the powerful, angular rocker *Hermes*.

O'Neill is a seminal front man, right out in front aurally and visually, singing with such visible emotion that he could be crooning laundry lists and people would swoon. Torrey, thumping his Carvin 6-string, holds down not only the bottom end, but several melody and harmony lines and chords as well, using pretty much every technique in the book to wow the crowd and push the music along. Six strings don't seem to be enough for this guy; in fact, before the show he confided: "I look forward to a day when 4-string basses are extinct."

→ When I have kids, I'm going to give them 6-strings right away, in the crib. By then I'll be playing at least ten." Babu's work with the sticks is impressive to say the least; this boy can swing 'em - especially impressive given the fact that he manages to remember all the songs and changes despite playing in seven other bands.

The secret weapon here, however, is Richardson. There's no doubt that he is destined for greatness on the silver strings - his playing has already gone through the Jeff Beck, Stevie Ray and Trey Anastasio phases and passed well beyond into a realm where he is starting to explore his own sounds and styles.

It's truly inspiring to watch him at work, fluidly intermingling rhythm and lead lines and carving out solos worthy of guitar-gods ten years his elder. He is a Berklee cat, of course, but he seems to have moved beyond that scene as well, eschewing the posing and the attitude that plagues some alumni of that famous music school. With a good voice, chops to burn and compositional skills to match, Richardson is a player to look out for (for a change of pace you can see him play keyboards with the popular reggae/soca band Noddacul' who are regulars at the Commonwealth Brewing Company near the Boston Garden).

Blase' Cabaret is beginning to pick up more gigs in the Boston area, and they should soon be coming out to the Valley to spread the Blas' way. They currently have one tape out, called *Subs*, and the quartet will be in the studio again over Columbus Day weekend to record their second. One way or another, you'll be hearing about them again - this is Rock of the Future here, folks, and you would be well advised to see these guys while there's still room left on the dance floor. For more info on Blase' Cabaret, call Brian Richards at (617) 629-8752, or email to nrich@world.std.com.

Matt Laurenc