

Iowa band sways crowd

She Swings, She Sways delivers solid set, charm at Right Right Records show

PHIL JARRETT
Reviewer

A van sat in front of the small Right Right Records — a monstrous antiquated thing wearing its years in a coat of rust and dirt. On the front grill, and perhaps right out of the film "Footloose," a deer skull had been attached with clothesline.

Suffice it to say, the band was from Ottumwa.

The usually six-piece She Swings, She Sways, played a four-man show to a meager crowd of fewer than 15 Sunday evening. On the makeshift stage in what clearly had once been a living room, lit primarily by a ceiling fan with attached light fixtures, the group appeared to be an assembly of grown-up high school cliques. On the drums and backup vocals was punk rocker Jason Bollinger. Next to the upright bass and occasionally singing was band-nerd Troy Morgan. Sporting a geeky, neglected handlebar mustache, Cory Canny rocked the acoustic guitar, mandolin, accordion, harmonica and intermittent lead vocals. And up front on guitar, mandolin and most vocals,

of course, was the quarterback, John Gordon, who commented on the missing two members of the band:

"We're doing something special tonight by not sounding as good."

Still, the set kicked off with a pleasant start: a song called "Even So" with a sound that fortunately complimented neither the band's eclectic appearance nor its redneck van's. A violin and acoustic guitar began two particularly poetic first verses, though the song was sometimes plagued by an easy rhyme,

before a sharp introduction of drums and bull fiddle. The effect was a good one, showcasing intuitive restraint clearly gained through three years of live-performance experience.

Admittedly fans of Okkervil River and old Uncle Tupelo, the group pumped out a short set of melodic acoustic bass-pop, each song distinctive in style and execution. Allowing the most impressive elements of each song to make their way to the foreground, all band members did some form of singing in nearly

every song, again showcasing a more organic talent that came out of collaborative effort rather than one singer-songwriter's imposition on the band mates. Unfortunately, much

of this intuitive best-foot-forward collaboration has not managed to find its way onto the recorded works the band has put out thus far, including one creative-yet-rough EP released Valentine's Day in which all band members wrote their own sad love songs. The material posted on the band's Web site and MySpace page simply lacks the spontaneity and kick of the live show, an all too common phenomenon for fledgling bands without major recording budgets.

All this aside, She Swings, She Sways wooed the venue with kooky banter during and between songs including a question-and-answer period, pretend squabbling between the two front men followed by a make-up kiss on the lips. The small but lively crowd periodically danced and clapped to the more upbeat songs, including the really funky "Stealin'" and "In the Distance," which featured an impressive performance by Canny on the harmonica.

Drummer Bollinger said the band might be returning to Kirksville April 25 to play at Vintage Grooves. The group also will be doing a summer tour starting in the Midwest, heading down South, then tacking up the East Coast before another round in the Midwest. Dates have yet to be posted. Still, with or without the two additional band members, She Swings, She Sways is definitely worth a listen and should be seen at a venue near you.

Just keep your eyes peeled for the van with the deer skull on the front.



Phil Jarrett/Index

Cory Canny, member of She Swings, She Sways, showcased his mastery of the mandolin and harmonica Sunday, along with his distinctive twangy vibrato.

Snoop brings pimp life, family love to new CD

HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

America's complicated love affair with Snoop Dogg began nearly 16 years ago. He stole the spotlight on the canonized 1992 G-Funk classic, Dr. Dre's "The Chronic." Rapping on more than half the tracks and all of the hit singles, most notably "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang," his languid, sing-song rhyming was the most thrillingly addictive flow since Q-Tip's.

Snoop's often violent, misogynistic rhymes became particularly ominous when delivered in his laid-back style. By the time he released his first proper album in 1993, he was one of the biggest stars in the game, a fact his fans proved by buying enough copies of his

album to make it the first debut album to enter the Billboard Charts at number one.

His career stalled in the following years as a much-publicized murder trial — he was found innocent — sapped his momentum, as did a dismal run on Master P's No Limit Records after leaving Death Row.

In 2000, he returned with "The Last Meal," an album that in retrospect set the course for the rest of his career. He abandoned his hard gangsta image in favor of a slightly more cartoonish pimp persona. From there, Snoop Dogg's career continued to thrive. Besides his numerous hit singles, he took roles in a variety of movies, from the good ("Training Day") to the silly ("Starsky and Hutch") to the abysmal ("Soul Plane").

During this time, he also got involved with television, starring in a surprisingly adept sketch comedy show ("Doggy Fizzle Televizzle") and a recent family reality show on E! ("Snoop Dogg's Father Hood").

The fact that Snoop has a family reality show only three years after producing his own pornographic films is a perfect example of his complex public persona. He famously smokes copious amounts of marijuana, he claims to work as a pimp and he still coaches his son's pee-wee football team.

These incongruities coupled with Snoop's struggle to stay relevant 15 years into his career inform his ninth studio album, "Ego Trippin'."

QDT Muzic, a production team made up of DJ Quik,

Snoop Dogg and Terry Riley, produces the majority of the disc. The three of them make enjoyable but fundamentally indistinguishable funky grooves, based heavily on the G-Funk pioneered by Dr. Dre in the late '80s.

QDT tracks like "Press Play" and "Gangsta Like Me" are vintage Snoop, hazy boasting over ominously funky beats. The songs aren't bad, but they also aren't particularly good — they're the kind of tracks Snoop could do in his sleep at this point in his career.

Fortunately, "Ego Trippin'" has its fair share of experimentation. The lead single "Sensual Seduction" (called "Sexual Eruption" on the unedited CD) is an intoxicating comic come-on. Over a swelling synthesizer,

Snoop Dogg sings through a T-Pain-style talk-box, promising corporeal satisfaction to some lucky lady.

Snoop pushes himself further with a credible cover of "Cool," a song written by Prince for '80s funk outfit The Time. Snoop sings the entire song over Terry Riley's faithful instrumentation. This stylistic departure fits in well with the retro production vibe of the other QDT tracks.

The oddest moment on the album comes toward the end when Snoop takes a stab at a country song, "My Medicine." Over an acoustic country shuffle courtesy of Everlast (of House of Pain fame), Snoop raps about the joys of scoring pills, appropriately dedicating the song to Johnny Cash, "a

real American gangsta." The song is surprisingly sincere, and the best country song you could hope for from a platinum-selling rap artist.

Although such excursions are nice, "Ego Trippin'" is hurt by its overly long play time, 21 tracks in an hour and 18 minutes. Snoop tries to cover too much ground.

Such dichotomies have been apparent in Snoop Dogg since the beginning and will undoubtedly continue to exist as long as he remains in the public eye. Still, with an album as enjoyable as "Ego Trippin'," Snoop proves he doesn't really have to make sense as long as he continues to drop hot rhymes that ensure his legacy as one of the greatest gangsta MCs of all time.

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