

Written by Mike Barrett

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It has been a long damn time since a show this good has come through town. A tight crowd of old friends, a few unexpected surprises, and top notch performances by all involved. This is what happens when the heirs to the throne of Man Is The Bastard come to town.

Amidst a day of flooding, streets getting closed and the end of a hectic weekend with no day off, I cut out of work early only to get to a show starting two hours late. The planned opener, Barn Owl, had some technical delays, so around 9:00, Jay Randall (of Agoraphobic Nosebleed) set up to play. Joining him, unplanned, was Sickness. For about 30 minutes these two ripped a wall of searing feedback that was nothing short of exhilarating. Jay had a table filled with nearly 20 pedals, samplers and who-the-hell knows what else. Sickness, with a no less impressive display of gear, one the got Bastard Noise's Wood and Barnes to gear gape over, took over the performance. He shredded and howled over Randall's whining din. The audience was floored. I can't imagine what the people in the karaoke bar in the next room thought.

Barn Owl took over with little delay. The free-sound trio of Andy Krespo on bass, Chris Cooper on prepared guitar and Matt Weston on percussion and electronics presented us with a sparser set. Their usual performances focus on short improvised blasts, exploring different paces and textures. Tonight they took it easy. Krespo was more prominent in their sound than usual, as Cooper took up a more subtle role in the sound scape. Weston spent more time making his drums hum and drone than attacking them with scatter brained ferocity. Barn Owl performed two longer pieces. The first built up in tension and climaxed when Weston turned on his electronics and picked up the pace. For a couple minutes, this solo of sorts resembled a live take on cut-up/glitch techno. As he mellowed out, so did the group and part one ended. For the second piece, Cooper did his usual trick with a knife and pitch shifter, but got much more angelic sounds than anything previous. From there out, the group moved around a tense sound scape easing out at the end.

Bastard Noise came on third. Through an impressive stack of home-made noise boxes and four intimidating speakers, Wood and Barnes doled out 45 minutes of harsh space noise. This group has become so streamlined and professional sounding over the past few years, it would be hard to recognize them as the same, except for Wood's two wooden-crated, tube-powered oscillators. And those two boxes haven't changed a bit. BN is still all the pop, wheeze and whine that Man Is The Bastard was becoming, and Wood is still screaming about the end of the world and the evils of mankind.

Barnes seemed to be more of the tech geek of the duo. He had control of the mixing and his gear looked more "professional" than Woods'. Woods had his two crates, a couple of other boxes, spouting wires and covered in nobs and switches, and this one little doo-dad that I've never seen before. It looked like a VCR wheel being spun against a spring. It made the eeriest whines and howls. Beautiful.

Closing the night was Grey Skull with Diagram A. Dan Greenwood (diagram A) has been out of

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the Valley for a few years, and any time he makes it back to play, old noise heads come out of the wood work. Tonight we got to see him play with his friends in Grey Skull.

Grey Skull has been on a bit of a slump the past few times I've seen them. This collaboration was a much needed kick in the pants for the band. This was probably Their best set I've seen since they first formed three years ago. Jeff Hartford's (A.K.A. Noise Nomads) drumming was no less neolithic than ever, but as a fierce pace, playing of off Greenwood's hyper-pulse electronics, the first half of their set was down right thrashy. Greenwood's and Grey Skull bassist George Meyers' sounds fused together seamlessly. Guitarist, Dan Cushman got a bit lost in the mix, moving more to a physical performance in the set than solely sonic, lumbering about, throwing drums and cymbals, thrashing his guitar impotently. Cushman added a physical presence that kept pace with the mayhem and violence the rest of the band of producing.

As the feedback faded away, one drunk karaoke fan from next door stumbled in shouting &quot;l'm here to crash the party!! The party's over!!&quot; A few people looked up from the distro table, broke from contestations with old friends, and quickly went back to the after show high we all were feeling, and the conversations revolving around &quot;Man, how awesome was that!&quot;