

## PRIMITIVE CALCULATORS LIVE REVIEW

Exford Hotel, Melbourne.  
Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1979.

Actually, this is half a review as My L have broken up. A group fraught with inconsistencies and unevenness: I felt they showed promise, but they are now defunct and their singer, songwriter and guitarist, Mick McBride is now out in the cold. UNLIKE MOST, I await with some anticipation whatever he gets up to next.

But on to the support group.

“Our recent efforts have all be complete disasters.” With a wry grin that seems to say, “Um, yes, well, it’s us”, while at the same time assaulting people with “Well, we’re ready, are you?”, Stuart (guitar/vocals) opens the evening.

An overwhelming unique group, with no obvious reference points, the Primitive Calculators have recently been plagued by back luck, sound and equipment. In particular, unsympathetic mixing, with Stuart’s guitar pushed right over the top, has resulted in onlookers gaining entirely false impressions of the band. Stuart’s playing recalls that of few others, except perhaps Lydia Lunch (Teenage Jesus and the Jerks). However, with Stuart in his right place, the guitar ‘just there’, the group as a whole positively shine.

The Primitive Calculators are Denise Rosenberg and David Light on keyboards, with David laying rhythms on a Wasp synthesizer instead of the now discarded bass guitar. Frank Lovece is responsible for the beats, utilising a drum machine and Stuart Grant sings and plays guitar. Frank also provides back up voices. There used to be a conventional drummer, be he wanted to Billy Cobham all over the place, so I imagine they decided to assume complete control in that department and install a drum machine. After all, a beats’ a beat.

It was the fifth time I’d seen them, and finally being able to really hear all the instruments in a better balance led me to discover just how pretty and delicate, dare I say subtle, the Primitive Calculators can be with their melodies and rhythmic arrangements. The beats worked out by Frank are now more complex, lending more character to the songs, without being overbearing, and I began to more properly appreciate the drum machine I used to view as sterile and a bit of a cop out. David in particular seems to have matured in the time since I saw them last (having witnessed none of their recent debacles), appearing a great deal more confident and the picture of concentrated effort. And he also seemed to have fun.

Denise, who often plays with an expression of amused and mild confusion on her face, always gently in time, her instruments emitting a series of complementary/contradictory sounds – harsh/pretty, atonal/melodic but never overdone, never indulgent. They play with complete economy; there’s never anything that distracts from anything else.

Stuart, unquestionably the Calculator's frontpiece, and the only one who stands up or talks in between songs, is the one you just have to look at. In a manner lacking any of the dramatic posturing of, say, Nick Cave, he pours his body, heart and soul in a most physical way into every moment of performance. Projecting utter conviction he propels the group through, thrashing with all manner of abuse at this instrument, stepping to the side at the right times, to acknowledge the group as a whole, and seeming not to enjoy it at all. But I'm sure that he does – after it's over. His rasping, disciplined voice compliments his guitar playing and the two blend ideally with the contrasts of the group as a whole.

They play a number of covers and apart from *The Beat Goes On*, they have done versions of *Nothing* (Fugs) and *White Cat Heat* (Godz, first record)...if that gives you any indication. It shouldn't. They have one disco number, and a truly riveting song called Square Dance. I tend to forget the names of songs, because the Calculators come on more as an onslaught of feelings and ideas, laying down challenges to the very structure of pop songs. Yes, Virginia – Pop Songs.

When they had finished, I was left feeling very happy, and with the question in mind "Why do people make music like that?" As I see it, no great (intentional) statements about Art, but a genuinely uncontrived and completely honest performance and some quite stunning sounds.

They are a very aptly named group.

The Primitive Calculators. Think about it.

-- Alan Bamford.