



# A Scientific thriller

## CONCERT

The Scientists  
Beck's Music Box  
Wednesday, February 13  
Review: Simon Collins

While Thriller was propelling Michael Jackson to the king of pop throne, over in some parallel universe The Scientists were concocting a sludgy brew of post-punk, proto-grunge guitar rock.

Did Blood Red River, the seminal mini-album the Perth-spawned but Sydney-based outfit recorded in Melbourne, really come out in 1983? Did it crawl out of the underground the same year that Beat It and Billie Jean were chartbusters? Eight whole years before Nirvana took grunge to the masses with Nevermind?

These thoughts swirled around my head as suitably ominous green and purple smoke swirled around Scientists frontman Kim Salmon's mop of hair, and his guitar snarled and growled at Tony Thewlis' guitar like a hungry dog, as founding bassist Boris Sujdovic and drummer Leanne Cowie nailed the band's off-kilter tempos.

This was the sound of The Scientists circa 1983, dragged to the present for

the Don't Look Back series, which sees cult bands recreate pivotal albums, and a rare Perth performance for the festival. Salmon recently said he didn't know whether he felt like a prodigal son or a conquering hero, but as the quartet ripped into Set It On Fire and 1000 music fans' jaws smashed into the Music Box's floor, it was clear the Perth-born underground guitar legend was the latter.

The menacing title track was followed by Revhead, with Thewlis using a vodka bottle to create riffs that sounded more like a hotrod burning rubber. Burnout continued the theme, clearly car-mad suburban Perth left a deep impression on Salmon, before The Spin and When Fate Deals Its Mortal Blow completed the six-track Blood Red River. "The album's over now," said Salmon, as they launched into the very next track on the expanded 2001 re-issue of The Scientists' material from 1982-84. (They stuck with the order on the re-issue rather than the original mini-album.)

Co-written with his Louie Louie bandmate Kim Williams, Swampland is arguably the band's signature song; a swampy, dangerous, chugging number with a bluesy rhythm underpinning the

raking guitars. While Salmon and Thewlis duelled, Sujdovic and Cowie provided momentum.

The Scientists then flipped to Swampland's A-side, This is My Happy Hour. The single was released in December, 1982, the same month as Thriller. The primitive yet entrancing We Had Love was another highlight, as was another song referencing cars, Demolition Derby. Salmon put down his guitar for the rumbling Solid Gold Hell.

Original guitarist Roddy Radalj and drummer James Baker, who had both joined Le Hoodoo Gurus by 1981, stumbled up on stage for a roll through the 1979 debut single and garage punk classic Frantic Romantic.

Radjalj's guitar solo was shambolic and both briefly ignored Salmon's hints that they let Thewlis and Cowie return to the stage, yet this was an awesome moment — one that will make this gig legend.

The Don't Look Back line-up reinstated, the band concluded with When Worlds Collide, featuring a howling harmonica solo from Salmon. The Scientists' astonishing Music Box performance proved that you can look back and still create a thriller night.



Belter: Kim Salmon in action for The Scientists. Picture: Greg Burke