



Good tunes on an older fiddle

CONCERT

Sonic Youth
Beck's Music Box
Review: Matt Giles

As good a place to start as any might be just how old Sonic Youth looked.

Thurston Moore's once vibrant elfin face has thickened into that of a weary cherub, Steve Shelley has put on a lot of weight but looks roughly the same, as does Lee Ranaldo but for some wrinkles and his helmet of grey hair, while Kim Gordon, the oldest of the group, looks like Mrs Redwood, my Year 10 English teacher.

This was mildly alarming at first but not for long. Once they unfolded the opening strains of Teenage Riot they morphed from simply a quartet of aged hipsters into Sonic Youth in their heyday.

It was their last performance of Daydream Nation for the Don't Look Back series and it seemed that there might be an air of irony in it from Moore, who wore an impassioned, possibly sarcastic pout while strumming the chromatic, driving melody of the song, but after the first verse it returned, apparently sincere.

Across the stage, Ranaldo too was quietly enjoying himself, rocking back and forth, while Gordon in the middle did her usual cool, blank head shake.

If they were sick of Daydream



Nation and wanted to return to their normal, freewheeling mode of set list composition they didn't show it, but they did appear especially pleased to indulge in the less scripted portions of the performance, such as Silver Rocket's middle section tempest.

They were playing well and happy to play, so with those concerns done away with thoughts turned to the positives and negatives of the Don't Look Back format.

Knowing which songs are upcoming creates mixed feelings. Before the crowd had even assembled anticipation for Teenage Riot was palpable, and when the time for Eric's Trip approached a light buzz filtered around the crowd.

But as there is with any album, unless you're a complete fan of it, there are inevitable lulls. Daydream Nation is not my favourite Sonic Youth album (interesting sidenote: Goo is) and I especially switch off during its middle third, so parts of it hit a little flat.

For most in attendance, of course, the entire show was exhilarating, except for at least one other person, a short fellow next to me who I oversaw sending a text to a friend saying: "Same chord for 45 minutes".

In that sense it really was a lot like listening to the record in your living room, except with the band up there playing it and 1000 friends listening.

The most cynical interpretation is that Don't Look Back reduces visionary bands to the status of jukebox, the more rose-coloured one is that it allows them to celebrate a favourite work and their entire career with a big mass of fans, but the true experience of the show sits somewhere in the middle.

You are simultaneously struck with the grandeur of history and art intersecting, but recognise that this band is a wild animal, and should be set free.

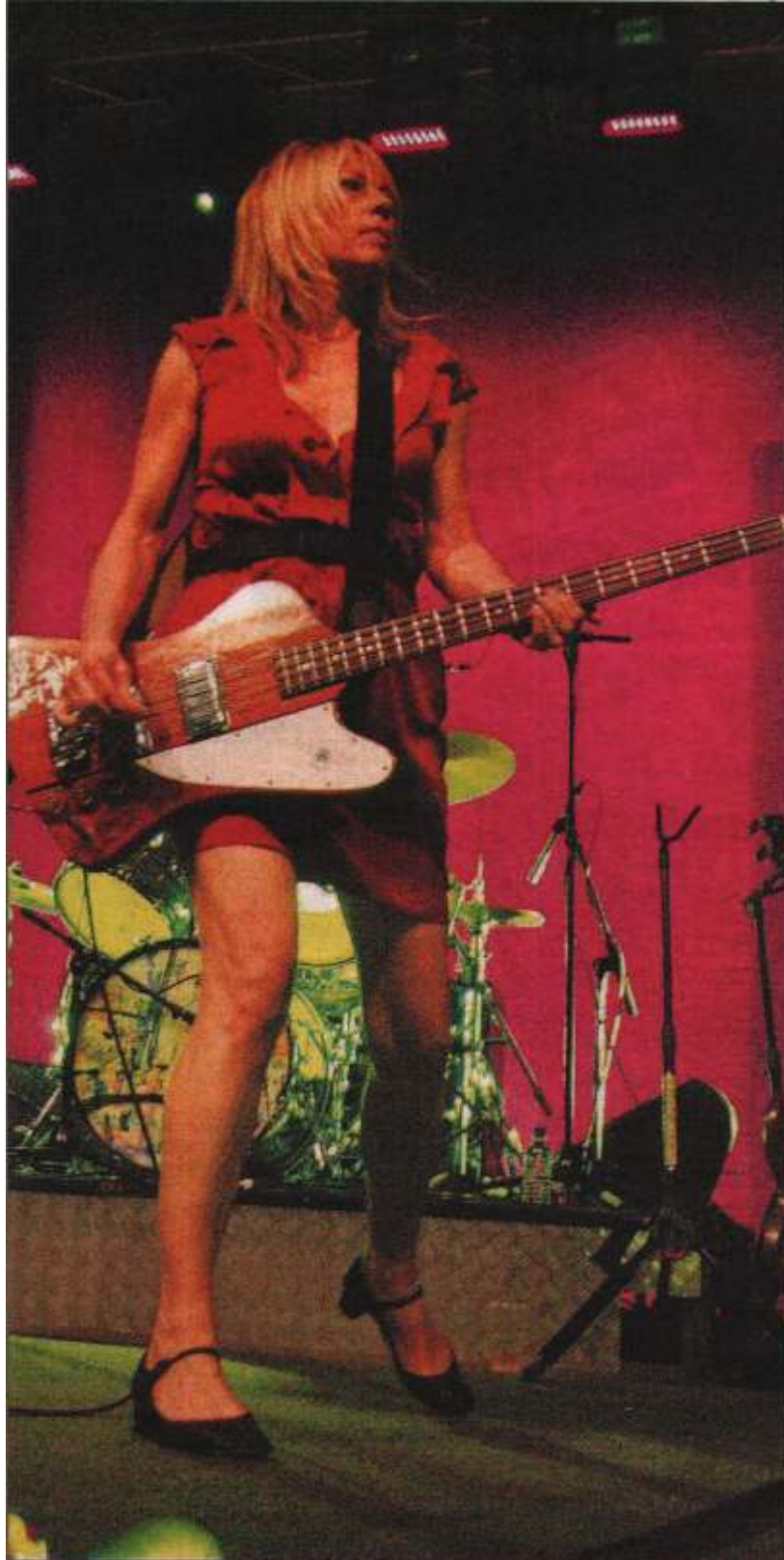
After the thrilling fog of Trilogy wound down and the band exited and re-entered the stage for a first and second encore they were given that opportunity, rifling off a selection of Rather Ripped tracks.

Pleasantly, songs like Incinerate and Jams Run Free stood up to their ancestors very well, and not just because they're newer.

They have a classic feeling, the same careening euphony that exists in the best songs of Sonic Youth, but have been somehow contemporised.

On their most recent material Sonic Youth have given over to rock, fighting the deceleration that is expected to come with age and proving that they cannot be hemmed in by the notion of the classic album.

For this, more so than Daydream Nation, will they be remembered.



Vintage: Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon has aged well, like the rest of the band.