

Reverb

By [John Floyd](#)

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I've seen some amazing shows since I moved to this tropical tip of the U.S. last November. Not many, mind you, this being Miami, an easy place to miss when you're mapping out a national tour, but enough to keep me relatively happy and mildly sane. And not to sound like some cheerleading schmoozer for whom everything local is good (leave some room for the Florida Music Association, I say), I have to say that the best stuff I've seen and heard has been delivered by homegrowns. Who? Jeez, where do I start. Fay Wray, who absolutely smoked the headlining Chapel Hill group Archers of Loaf at a South Beach Pub show last spring. Creamy 'Lectric Santa, who during a typically chaotic, haywire show last fall provided my introduction to both Miami's grimy rock and roll underbelly and its primary venue, Churchill's Hideaway. The Spam All-Stars, whose screwy jazz-rock hybrid and circuslike multimedia presentations at Cheers never fail to dazzle and amaze me. Harry Pussy, whose most recent local show -- a pretour rehearsal, really -- was a wondrous and cacophonous event despite the insistence from HP main guy Bill Orcutt that it wasn't. Nil Lara, who rocked the H.O.R.D.E. Festival last month like he owned it. And Cafe Nostalgia's house band Grupo Nostalgia, whom I've seen way too many times to count and whose intense, raucous, and incandescent sets never fail to convince me that -- even in my darkest hours -- moving to Miami was the right thing to do, despite the city's shortcomings.

I felt the same way the other night at Churchill's, site of the September 21 show by the Eat, a Miami quartet who back in the late Seventies heeded the rabble-rousing call of the Sex Pistols, the Clash, and the Ramones and knocked out a handful of crudely recorded masterpieces that were variously silly, scary, and scabrous. Although their records have been out of print for eons, and fetch obscene prices these days on the collector's market, I knew of the Eat's genius long before I hung a shingle at this paper. A bootleg punk series called Killed by Death featured a few Eat tracks among the excavated arcana by lost legends such as Boston's Nervous Eaters and New York City's Chain Gang, and a friend from my hometown of Memphis had included a couple of the same Eat tracks on a hodgepodge made for me a long, long time ago. Shortly after I settled in Miami I learned that the Eat were still a band -- sort of, at least. The four members still got together on rare occasions for gigs at Churchill's -- the most recent of which was in 1992 -- and had even issued a 1995 EP (Hialeah) composed of unissued cuts recorded a few years earlier. Whatever its vintage, the record rocked with fury and abandon, with a sneer and a smirk.

Still, there was no reason to think that a regrouped Eat would be any better than a regrouped Sex Pistols, a regrouped Buzzcocks, or any other punk-rock usta-be who's back on the concert trail hoping to stuff their bondage-pants pockets with tour dollars. A cash-in is a cash-in, whether it's Johnny Rotten slinging insults into a Gen-X audience or the fat, flabby men of KISS slathering their puffy, pockmarked faces with greasepaint and glitter for yet another platform-booted stomp among the flash pots and smoke bombs of yore. Go ahead: Get your ya-yas out with the traveling relics of your past; just don't

make the mistake of attaching any musical significance to these hollow romps down memory lane.

The Eat show, though, that was something different. And honestly, I'm not sure I've even figured out exactly why. It worked on too many different levels, defied so many critical notions and preconceptions -- both my own and those of anyone else who takes this stuff too seriously.

For starters, they looked great -- about as punk rock as any four counter slugs you'd find hunkered down at a roadside diner, like blue-collar Joes who went to the gig straight from work without changing clothes. Bassist Ken Lindahl and guitarist/vocalist Michael O'Brien haven't changed much, save a few more lines on their faces, but Michael's brother, guitarist/vocalist Eddie O'Brien, is carrying around a little more weight in the gut region. Drummer Chris Cottie, never a man of slight build, looks about the same -- a formidable presence behind the kit. After a swell opening set by the ramshackle pop duo the Funyons, the Eat took Churchill's stage with little fanfare. Then, they just started rocking -- a big, sloppy, loose-limbed kind of punk rock, raw and mangy, with squalling guitars, bulldozer drums, and driving, relentless bass. The O'Briens screamed and yelled and howled and wailed like men well less than half their respective ages, creating a blazing din not for the money (three bucks a head at the door does not a rich band make) but for the sheer fun of making some noise. "Communist Radio," the stuff from God Punishes the Eat, Scattered Wahoo Action, and Hialeah -- everything worked, everything clicked. I can't imagine it sounding any better back in the early Eighties, when the Eat were playing at South Florida dives like the Balkan, Club, Tier 3, and the Premier.

And it doesn't matter even if they did. The crowd at the Churchill's show was going completely bonkers throughout the entire set, fueled on alcohol, adrenaline, and who knows what else, slamming into each other in one of the sloppiest, drunkest mosh pits I've ever had the pleasure of avoiding. Kids who weren't even born when "Communist Radio" was released, old-timers who bought the record when it was new, all of them screaming the words to every song back at the band with such fervor and manic glee that Eddie O'Brien -- hell, the whole band -- couldn't help but survey the enthusiastic fools in front of them with smiling disbelief.

"The songs still work," said one of the old-timers, eyeballing the chaos from the outer rim of the sweaty pit, just before the last song skronked to a halt.

She was right.

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