

## LONDON PLACARD - REVIEW

**Clive Bell** - *The Wire* magazine (Issue 247 - september 04)

--

If you've ever attended a concert where electronic sound was being relentlessly corraled through a protesting PA system, where the music actually sounded better from the bar in the adjacent room, where metropolitan networking and supping seemed more attractive, more urgent, than listening to the performers, and you wondered whether there might be another way of presenting electronic music, then you may welcome Placard, the London Headphone Festival, an annual all-dayer at Hoxtons' delightfully crumbling State51 factory.

Listeners sprawl around a large room on carpets and sofas, all connected by headphone cables to the current performer, and all, praise the Lord, listening, in varying degrees of rapture or intensity. A projection on the wall tells that this 20 minute slot will finish in 617 seconds, while the next couple of acts are discreetly setting up. I enter, plug my headphones (you have to bring your own) into the matrix, and commandeer a deckchair. I'm basking in a golden spotlight, lulled by gently rolling breakers of processed electric guitar from Karina ESP and Cheap Machines. It's as good as being at the beach.

40 acts each present a 20 minute piece in the continuously segued programme. Even my brief sampling - three hours in the afternoon - shows a consistently high standard. The Placard atmosphere is convivial and oddly comforting. Around the record stall and bar there's time to chat, but in the performance room it's impossible to talk and listen at the same time, so full attention is focused on the sound. Smack Miranda (aka Robin Warren from the Liberation Jumpsuit collective and Resonance FM) bleeds sci-fi disasters warnings into his Ambient laptopia. Warren describes his music as "dyspeptic Illbience", but I'm afraid I thoroughly enjoyed it.

More robust and driven, Monoke's John Chantler strums guitar chords, using his laptop to sculpt them into a base for a melody on hammered strings. Chantler's raw approach is tempered by fine judgement and pacing. Suffolk based Holkham (aka Simon Keep) mixed field recordings - rain? Garden furniture? Vegetable growing? - with diabolical outbursts of distorto-bass, in a set of homegrown mystery.

Janek Schaefer is of of Placard's more heavyweight names. Cunningly bookending his whole show as a message left on an answering machine, he shuffles recordings of different rooms and ambiances, subtle stuff that works well over headphones, but would hardly survive over a PA. Schaefer segues to electronic treatments, and then jumpcuts to himself in a Cambridge pub, attempting to break the record for the number of records broken in 30 seconds. It's a slightly embarrassing pub item, and via headphones we are all vividly present.

In complete contrast, Hot Chip are a five piece group, complete with backing vocals, a vanload of keyboards and the year's most delicate kazoo playing. Their version of Chic's "At Last I Am Free" has an excellent blend of chaos and soulfulness. Emanuela de Angelis (from the Mou, Lips! project) takes us back to a chilled laptop, glistening aromatics and soothing drones propelled by a gentle beat. I notice that, unlike many, she has no stickers on her computer. Also that an audience member is bootlegging her set to minidisc via one of the hundreds of headphone sockets.

Among the acts I sadly missed were David Toop with Max Eastley, Viv Corringham with Dallas Simpson, and Brighton's Same Actor/Rashamon team, whose photo looked promisingly psychedelic. Hopefully I'll be back next year.

--