Beauty and the beasts

Holiday calls for ‘Wonder’—or is it ‘Crush Kill Destroy’?

Among other things, Halloween provides a nice litmus test of personality. Some invariably costume themselves as princesses and superheros. Others court as vampires and blood-splattered psychos.

Two shows this Halloween weekend offer a similar sort of gauge.

For those who enjoy dressing up as flirty fairy tale figures, Natalie Merchant is at the new Renaissance Theatre on Saturday.

Concertline
Rick Hager

Natalie Merchant’s first solo outing, "Tigress," is Merchant’s first solo outing, and while it certainly hasn’t turned off the fans. It lacks the diversity and spark of her work with 10000 Maniacs.

There are some interesting song subjects and languidly catchy melodies, but the music and lyrics generally groove through commonplace adult rock terrain.


For those who prefer more gritty fare, Gwar brings its gore-soaked theater of the absurd to the Riviera Theatre for its annual Halloween extravaganzas.

The masked masters of exploitive punk-metal are out promoting their latest tongue-in-cheek fracas, "Rag ’N Roll." As with all Gwar productions, its lyrical and theatrical meldage of terror, comedy, cringe humor, slashers and general blasphemy leaves the music to take a back seat.

That’s probably for the best.

The band’s music is little more than a slick patchwork of parodies and ripoffs. Black Sabbath, Suicidal Tendencies, Frank Zappa, and Meatloaf all have their work plundered and reconfigured in Gwar’s rolling punk-rock ragout. A mix of flashy entertainment and recycled music, a Gwar show is like a Broadway musical from Hell.


Candlebox, Friday at the U.C. Pavilion. Perhaps no other band has the sound of the moment down as well as Candlebox’s Candlebox. The churning guitar riffs, smoggy keyboards, and new-worlded keyboards have led many to believe that the band is a part of the hour. An excellent band in the wrong hands, such stuff all been commoditized are made of. The band’s new "Layin’ sticks with requisite force and disposes unambiguously resonant. Still, Candlebox’s songwriting lacks the nuance, diversity and hooks that would make them truly memorable. Spoonful and Our Lady Peace.

This Friday and Saturday at Fillmore West, CD box which established itself as a cult favorite will release an equaly emrked rock’s warping energy and country’s unvarnished simplicity. It’s part of a highly respected, still finely independent group of Texas songwriters that includes Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Butch Hancock and rock and Tyler Men’s. It’s new record, "Catalpa," is a true revel at the school of rock architecture. The band’s most recent record, "Songs for the Times," "Crush Kill Destroy," features a mix of great tunes delivered with white-noise, noise style intensity.

Health News and the Band Fools Five, Friday at the Double Door. Novak’s Bermuda-born British pop phenom with a penchant for dressing superhuman, megalomania melodics is an artist who has seen his fair share of team success for the most part. His recent album, "Halcyon," is a necessary animal.

Then, But Elastica plunder the music, fashion, and design magazines with an ability that makes the selling of Rome look like a mere pastime. Well, thank you if you think you’ve heard it all before, you probably have. Their Speaking Courtesty, Thursday at the Sputnik, Band’s Speaking Courtesty in classic hard rock. It’s a sad record for his whose musical blueprint dates back to the school of rock architecture. The band’s most recent record, "Songs for the Times," "Crush Kill Destroy," features a mix of great tunes delivered with white-noise, noise style intensity.

Touring behind his first release in eight years, Towers Van Zandt comes to Schubas.

Tours Van Zandt, Friday at Schubas. This hard-driving North Carolina-based quartet is riding a swell of critical acclaim. The Architects were on the scene yesterday with a lot of the cool gazers that rock off. The guitars wend and wrench over the drums, offering a driving rhythm section.

I remain a Mariah Carey lover, as she continues to hold the top spot on the annual black music, albums and R&B charts.

The most impressive new album entry is made by Green Day, whose latest punk pop opus, "American Idiot," debuts just behind Carey’s "Daydream." And Jackson also makes a strong album showing with "Design of a Decade" taking the N3 spot. Natalie Merchant cracks the singles chart with "Dust on the Bottle."

Natalie Merchant cracks the singles chart with "Carnival" from her first solo effort, and David Lee Murphy tops the country singles chart with "Dust on the Bottle."

Country singles chart with "Dust on the Bottle."