

Friday P Chicago Tribune, Friday, October 27, 1995

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 superheroes. Others cavort as vampires and blood-spattered psychos.

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

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

Concertline

Rick Reger

night supporting her hit record "Tigerlily."

Merchant first came to prominence as the lead singer for the folk-pop group 10,000 Maniacs. Her distinctive voice and idiosyncratic phrasing became the hallmarks of the Maniacs' sound, and her band mates' deft playing and versatile songwriting helped the band appeal to a wide cross-section of the public. "Tigerlily" 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 10,000 Maniacs. There are some interesting song subjects and languidly catchy melodies, but the music and lyrics generally traipse through commonplace adult rock terrain.

Notable song titles: "Wonder," "Beloved Wife," "Cowboy Romance."

For those who prefer more grisly fare, Gwar brings its gore-soaked theater of the absurd to the Riviera Tuesday for its annual Halloween extravaganza.

The masked masters of exploitive punk-metal are out promoting their latest tongue-in-cheek fracas, "Rag Na Rok." As with all Gwar productions, its lyrical and theatrical melange of apocalyptic imagery, crude humor, slasher fantasies and general blasphemy leaves the music to take a back seat.

That's probably for the best.



Grisly Halloween fun with the Gwar extravaganza: Who says Western civilization is in decline?

The band's music is little more than a slick patchwork of parodies and rip-offs. 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.

Notable song titles: "Meat Sandwich," "Knife in Your Guts," "Crush Kill Destroy."

Candlebox, Friday at the U.I.C. Pavilion: Perhaps no other band has the sound of the moment down as cold as Seattle's Candlebox. The churning guitar riffs, seismological bass lines and raw-throated howls of twentysomething anguish and ennui are, in the wrong hands, such stuff as beer commercials are made of. The band's new record, "Lucy," rocks with requisite force and displays unassailable conviction. Still, Candlebox's songwriting lacks the subtlety, diversity and surprise that would make them truly memorable. *Sponge and Our Lady Peace* open.

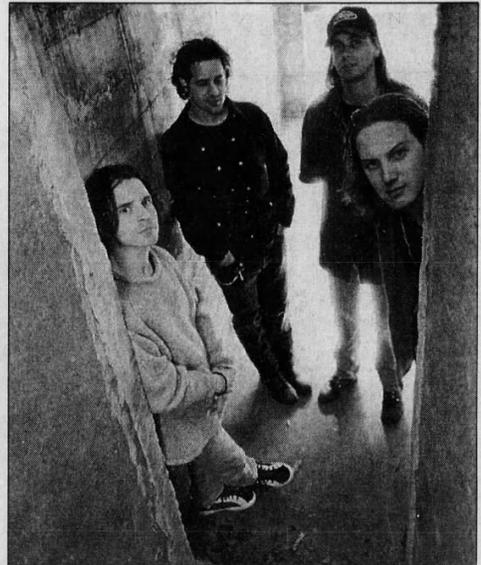
Joe Ely Band, Friday and Saturday at Fitzgerald's: Ely was once considered a misfit because his freewheeling music equally embraced rock's searing energy and country's unvarnished simplicity. He's part of a highly respected, still fiercely independent group of Texas songwriters that includes Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Butch Han-



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

cock and Terry Allen. Ely's new record, "Letter to Laredo," is a more relaxed, mostly acoustic affair heavily inflected with flamenco music inspired by a recent trip to Spain. Though the show will be all acoustic as well, expect plenty of sweaty strumming and gritty storytelling.

Elastica, Tuesday at the Vic: It's not unusual for rock bands to borrow a riff or recycle a chord progression every now and



Strange brew: Seattle's Candlebox has the sound of the moment down cold, which may or may not be a good thing.



Natalie Merchant's first solo outing, "Tigerlily," has made a strong showing.

then. But Elastica plunders the Wire, Buzzcocks and Blondie songbooks with an alacrity that makes the sacking of Rome look like a purse-snatching. With *Elastica*, if you think you've heard it all before, you probably have.

Three Speaking Canaries, Thursday at the Empty Bottle: Three Speaking Canaries' stock-in-trade is classic hard rock. It's a power trio whose musical blueprints derive from the Cream-Alice Cooper-Van Halen school of rock architecture. The band's most recent record, "Songs for the Terrestrially Challenged," features a slew of great tunes delivered with white-hot, Stooges-style intensity.

Heather Nova and the Ben Folds Five, Friday at the Double Door: Nova is a

Bermuda-born British pop chanteuse with a penchant for dreamy, introspective, minor-key melodies à la Tori Amos and Sarah McLachlan. Her new, rather nondescript record, "Oyster," will appeal to fans of that genre but isn't likely to ignite much interest elsewhere. The Ben Folds Five is actually a Chapel Hill bass-drums-piano trio. Folds re-establishes the grand piano as a rock 'n' roll weapon with his Elton-esque keyboard banging. It's sometimes catchy, sometimes too coy for its own good.

Archers of Loaf, Saturday at the Lounge Ac: This hard-rocking North Carolina-based quartet is riding a swell of critical acclaim. The Archers seem to have an inexhaustible supply of catchy riffs, but the band dirties them up with a familiar coating of indie rock grit. The guitars skitter and screech over raggedly raw singing and a piddling rhythm section.

Townes Van Zandt, Friday at Schubas: Though he lacks the name recognition of many lesser talents, country/folk troubadour Townes Van Zandt is one of the true giants of American music. His tales of lonely wandering and lost love are delivered with a rough-hewn poetry and honesty that's almost too painful to witness yet too powerful to ignore. His most recent record, "No Deeper Blue," was his first release in almost eight years. Its haunting, elegiac music and poignant stories more than confirm Van Zandt's legendary status.

Shaggy, Sunday at the Cubby Bear: Shaggy is one of the rising stars on the reggae/dance hall scene. His latest record, "Boombastic," recently went gold after spawning a Top 10 single last summer. That success puts Shaggy in pretty select company: Only a handful of other Jamaican dance hall artists have made a similar dent in the American charts.

Music Charts

It remains a Mariah Carey world, as she continues to hold the top spot on the singles, albums and R&B charts.

The most impressive new album entry is made by Green Day, whose latest punk-pop opus, "Insomniac," debuts just behind Carey's "Daydream." And Janet Jackson also makes a strong album showing with "Design of a Decade" taking the No. 4 spot.

Natalie Merchant cracks the top 10 singles with "Carnival" from her first solo effort, and David Lee Murphy tops the

country singles chart with "Dust on the Bottle."

- Top singles**
1. Fantasy—Mariah Carey
 2. Gangsta's Paradise—Coolio featuring L.V.
 3. Runaway—Janet Jackson
 4. Kiss From a Rose—Seal
 5. You Are Not Alone—Michael Jackson
 6. As I Lay Me Down—Sophie B. Hawkins
 7. Tell Me—Groove Theory
 8. Only Wanna Be With You—Hootie & the Blowfish
 9. Back for Good—Take That
 10. Carnival—Natalie Merchant

- Top albums**
1. Daydream—Mariah Carey
 2. Insomniac—Green Day

3. Jagged Little Pill—Alanis Morissette
4. Design of a Decade: 1986-1996—Janet Jackson
5. Dangerous Minds—soundtrack
6. Cracked Rear View—Hootie & the Blowfish
7. Starting Over—Reba McEntire
8. All I Want—Tim McGraw
9. CrazySexyCool—TLC
10. The Woman in Me—Shania Twain

- Country singles**
1. Dust on the Bottle—David Lee Murphy
 2. I'm Not Strong Enough to Say No—Blackhawk
 3. She's Every Woman—Garth Brooks
 4. Check Yes or No—George Strait
 5. No Man's Land—John Michael Montgomery

6. Safe in the Arms of Love—Martina McBride
 7. Better Things to Do—Terri Clark
 8. Let's Go to Vegas—Faith Hill
 9. I Let Her Lie—Daryle Singletary
 10. I Like It, I Love It—Tim McGraw
- Adult contemporary singles**
1. Kiss From a Rose—Seal
 2. As I Lay Me Down—Sophie B. Hawkins
 3. Only Wanna Be With You—Hootie & the Blowfish
 4. Run-Around—Blues Traveler
 5. Back for Good—Take That
 6. I Can Love You Like That—All-4-One
 7. Roll to Me—Del Amitri
 8. You Are Not Alone—Michael Jackson
 9. Runaway—Janet Jackson
 10. Fantasy—Mariah Carey

- R&B singles**
1. Fantasy—Mariah Carey
 2. Who Can I Run To—Xscape
 3. Tell Me—Groove Theory
 4. Brokenhearted—Brandy
 5. Sentimental—Deborah Cox
 6. I Hate U—artist formerly named Prince
 7. Runaway—Janet Jackson
 8. Gangsta's Paradise—Coolio featuring L.V.
 9. Like This and Like That—Monica
 10. Heaven—Solo

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INSTRUCTIONS ON PAGE 4, SECTION 1
Complete Billboard Charts F831