

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO
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DANCE

Rock: 3 Bands on a Single Bill

By JON PARELES

THE avant-garde Kitchen turned into something like a rock club this week, presenting 12 bands on four triple bills. The opening concert of the series ended shortly after three policemen arrived; the Kitchen's SoHo neighbors, for blocks around, had complained about the noise being made by the Swans.

The music was, indeed, noisy stuff. The three bands on the bill — the Swans, Sonic Youth and Bill's Friends — all layer discordant sound atop steady drumbeats. But the Swans performed at vindictive volume levels, twice as loud as the other two bands, for no discernible purpose.

Sonic Youth gets most of its noise from up to three rapidly strummed electric guitars, which compete with shouted vocals by Thurston Moore or Kim Gordon. Mr. Moore borrows his stage moves — crouching into fetal

position, writhing on his back in the audience — from Iggy Pop and PIL's John Lydon, but the vocals are a sideshow to the raging guitars.

Like Glenn Branca's symphonies, whose guitar orchestras have included Sonic Youth members, the music focuses on texture and the "resultant melodies" each listener picks out of a complex drone.

Rhythm and noise are more evenly matched in Swans songs, which use Latin and funk rhythms along with simple stomps. A drummer and a percussionist divide up the beat, while the Swans guitarists create an amorphous roar with feedback, low rumbling notes and other Jimi Hendrix effects.

At a reasonable volume, it might sound like a prehistoric earthquake complete with trumpeting mastodons, but in Monday's onslaught the Swans defeated their own ingenuity.

Bill's Friends played only three songs. One was derivative funk; the others used cello and either guitar or violin for drones that evoked folk music.

New York Times, Dec. 29, 1982

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Rock Festival: Four Groups At Kitchen

By JON PARELES

The final night of the Kitchen's brief New York rock festival Thursday was a quadruple bill: the Beastie Boys, the Ordinaires, the Toykillers and Elephant Dance. Its standout was the set by the Ordinaires, a polished instrumental octet from the Lower East Side.

The Ordinaires' pieces set up a complex call-and-response between seemingly incompatible instruments: pairs of violins and saxophones and two guitarists, one at each end of the stage. In one tune, the saxophones might honk out rhythm figures while the violins carried a melody; in another, the roles were reversed. The band's asymmetrical tunes collided or overlapped or ricocheted or combined, sometimes all at once.

In a way, the Ordinaires' music sums up the new Lower East Side. The violins can moan Eastern European phrases, the saxophones add rhythm-and-blues accents, the guitarists provide arty noise and the rhythm section keeps up a brisk funk or Latin beat. It's a clean-cut operation, smart but deliberately not slick.

The Toykillers, a quartet, includes the guitarist Arto Lindsay, formerly of DNA. Their songs, like DNA's, last for minutes or seconds. They proceed in fits and starts with sudden harsh noises and equally sudden bits of finesse in exact, utterly unpredictable structures.

The Beastie Boys, none of whom is over 17 years old, jeered at the audience's ages and college degrees. Between tirades, they played hard-core songs — bursts of ultrafast hard rock — which lacked their full power because the Kitchen crowd didn't join the lead singer Michael Diamond in leaping and flailing around.

Elephant Dance, four percussionists, played a variety of ethnic rhythms, including samba and Afro-Cuban workouts, with a little more precision than the average street-corner drum band.

New York Times
January 1, 1983