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**"The most beautiful thing we can
experience
is the mysterious. It is the source of all
true art and science." -
Albert Einstein (1879 - 1955)**

THE CHURCH and Sea Ray

the House of Blues
Chicago, IL
Mar. 12, 2004



The Church

Review and Photos by Brad Walseth

Despite the innate human desire to categorize and assign all things to their place, there are bands that ultimately remain impossible to pigeonhole into any particular genre. Seeming to exist in a

universe of their own making, such bands generally struggle outside the mainstream and are relegated to obscure cult status. More the pity then, as this music is often the most interesting and compelling sounds around. Indeed, a primary reward of attending cult band concerts is that you can usually be assured that the band will play the music they want to play in the way they want to - without the overriding and corrupting concern for commercial success. Such was the case Friday night at the House of Blues, when long-time cult-darlings - The Church brought their four members together from the far flung reaches of Sweden and Australia for an intimate evening with a crowd of hard core fans.



First

though, Brooklyn based Sea Ray started the evening off with their unique brand of psychedelic chamber pop music, which combines synthesizers, guitars, hard hitting drumming, and pleasant melodies with a soaring lead cello. Yes cello! As wielded by the waif-like, Anne Brewster, the normally staid classical instrument found a voice in the world of rock music. The Rays rocked,

but with a melodic component that made them the perfect match for the headliners. Their music itself is, like The Church's, hard to describe, but their distinctively captivating songs deserve a wider audience.

The Church's technique has always been deceptively simple - just mix two guitars, a bass and drums and let it rip. But rather than try to fit a preconceived notion of what popular songs should sound like, the Church have always played from their hearts and heads. With Steve Kilbey's haunting, impassioned vocals and contrapuntal bass lines often leading the way, guitarists Marty Willson-Piper and Peter Koppes wove intricate sounds into a dreamlike epiphany - Willson-Piper primarily providing the attacking staccato force, while Koppes brought the shimmering e-bow strains into play. Rounding out the mix was solid drummer, Tim Powles, who pushed and pulled and kept the band grounded even during their most ethereal flights of fancy.

Colorful designs, symmetrical patterns from nature, close-ups of butterfly wings and flowers, sand dunes, faces, abandoned houses, ruined temples, tapestries, even ink blots - these images and more flashed on the screen behind the band - as they ran through music from throughout their career - and the images provided fascinating and frustrating clues to the mystery that is The Church. Their sound is complex and textured yet the parts of the whole simple and the result becomes distinctly their own. The songs are intelligent, searching, spiritual, and built of a style of architecture

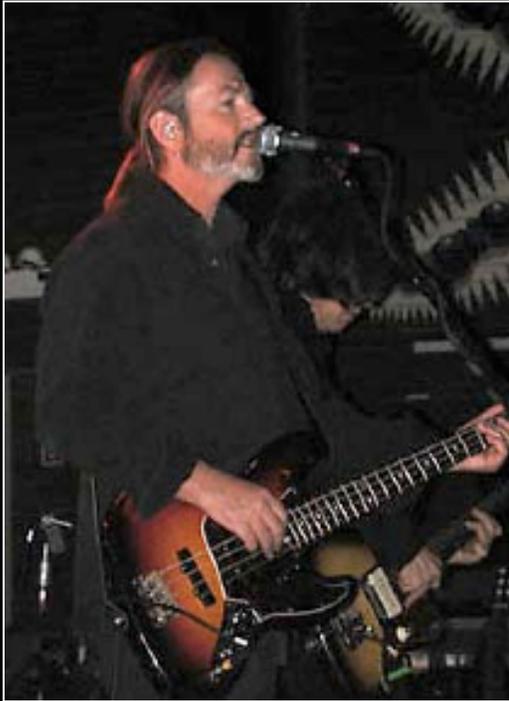
not unlike a gothic cathedral... if it were built on a glacier... on Mars.

This is not to say they don't write "songs." Their repertoire ranges from the beautiful and sublime "Radiance," where the innocence of children in the face of a miracle is sullied by the baseness of the world, to the hard rocking "Reptile" - where Willson-Piper's familiarly taunting guitar riff had the crowd chanting and fist pumping in rhythm. The symmetry between the two guitarists - with bassist Kilbey's quirky lines filling the spaces - was a treat to watch - as from playing together for so long they seem to have an intimate feel for how best to work together to create the sound that is their signature; and rockers like "Tantalized", "Numbers" and the superb "Chromium" gave plenty of opportunity for the guitarists to show their chops.

Several new cuts from their new album showed a return to more of the hard-edged material of their past after the relative placidity of last year's release - "After Everything Now This" - where the cover shot of a desolate and wind swept beach seemed an apt metaphor for the beautifully cold and introspective songs contained within. And of course the crowd pleasing - "Under the Milky Way" - still their biggest hit (and a hell of a great pop song) was performed with admirable aplomb.

Intelligence, beauty, rawness, and a sense of dynamics are qualities not often found in modern music (one notable exception being admitted Church fans, Thom Yorke and Radiohead). One can only hope The Church can overcome the obstacles that befall all cult bands and continue to return -

like the tide on that forlornly empty beach -
to provide an alternative for those who seek
more out of music than the usual
shallowness of vision and emptiness of
theme.



The Church



Sea Ray

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