
Mudmen put the punk into celtic rock

Duncan Ramsay;staff reporter;dramsay@imprint.uwaterloo.ca

The Mudmen started off with a beer and a bang, but the concert began with a whimper. Arriving at the Bomber on Friday, November 17, I was surprised to find the place only half-full.

I'd been looking forward to the concert for a couple of weeks, more for the novelty of the act (It's rock, with bagpipes) than for any real familiarity with the band. I'd heard a few of their songs, however, and liked them, so I wondered at the relative emptiness of the bar. It didn't take long to find out why.

Mixing with the crowd, I quickly discovered that despite the time featured on posters scattered across campus, the concert didn't start at 9 p.m. — it was only that the doors opened then, and even the opening band wouldn't take the stage for another hour or so. More than slightly irritated, I ordered some fries and settled down to wait.

The minutes ticked by, and eventually the opening band took the stage to the mild interest of the crowd. This turned out to be The First Time, a standard punk-rock band. Opening with "New Day Dawning" off their new three-song EP, The First Time quickly established itself as what it was — an opening number. As punk-rock goes, these guys certainly weren't bad, but there was so little originality or genuine energy about their music they faded into the background for me. The exception to this was in Ron McJannet's (lead singer) vocals, which brought to mind a more nasal Billy Talent with occasional touches of Our Lady Peace, and which were impressively strong and controlled. Even so, this band didn't seem to know how to hold the stage. Whether this is a symptom of the band's recent re-organization or not remains to be seen, but the fact was that McJannet, bassist Bill Borda and guitarist James Whitton did little more than stand and deliver, which just wasn't enough for a live show. Stacey Washington, the band's drummer, should be given credit though; he spent the show blissfully and obliviously bludgeoning the fear of God into his drums.

In the end, the band departed without regret or animosity from the crowd. After a few tense minutes, the Mudmen took the stage minus their lead singer, bringing most of the bar surging to their feet and launching into a blistering five minute instrumental tailor-made to psyche up the crowd. From the start, it was apparent that the Mudmen were in a different ballgame than their openers. Snarling, stomping and flipping off the crowd, the band tore up the stage, ripping through their set with a staggering ferocity. It helped that every member of the band looked the part; you could easily picture these guys tearing up a bar without any problems. The bagpipers in particular (Robby and Sandy Campbell) dominated the stage, looking like a bouncer from a biker bar and the kind of aging Harley enthusiast who inexplicably manages to date a string of supermodels. Shortly joined by their lead singer (Zoy Nicoles), the band toasted the crowd with a can of Bud and got down to business, beginning with "5 O'Clock" and continuing with a drive that never relented. Mudmen's music is a mix of hard rock and various Celtic styles that were perfectly suited to playing a bar. The bagpipes, besides adding a unique side to their rock, work especially well in an enclosed space like the Bomber. The band also has the kind of stage presence that demands a mosh pit — angry, electrifying and full of energy. The crowd was already juiced by the time the band started handing out beer; once they reached their hit cover of "Home for a rest," the Bomber officials could barely keep the moshing crowd off the stage. In the end, the Bomber-folk had to give up, as two or three shirtless guys joined the band on stage, belting out AC/DC's "A Long Way To The Top" to bring the night to a close.

By the time the concert had finished the chants of "Mudmen! Mudmen!" echoed as loudly as the band had played. In the end, the Mudmen are exactly what you might expect them to be — the best riot you've ever been to, and as good a time as you're likely to have, drunk or sober. If you haven't seen them yet, don't miss the next opportunity; we were lucky to have them here.