



dresden dolls

DRESDEN DOLLS/JASON WEBLEY/*The Stone Pony*/April 6

by Cathy Miller

ASBURY PARK—It was a beautiful night for a stroll down the beach, the end of a fine, early spring day. Although the surf had a strong pull, *The Stone Pony* beckoned with the promise of a "real show."

For anyone who arrived late, the first performance of the night was in itself worth the price of admission. Jason Webley, from Seattle, took the stage in a raggedy trench coat, fedora hat and big old accordion. Opening with a melancholy song called "Life," one was immediately struck by the intensity and passion of his performance. He followed with a playful call and response "Aaar" "divaark" during which he regaled everyone with aardvark observations and invited the crowd to waltz. He did a manic version of Springsteen's "I'm On Fire," dubbing it a mix between Asbury Park and the Dresden Dolls. During this song he urged, "everybody polka." On many songs, he accompanied himself with a vodka bottle shaker containing a few rocks. Some songs consisted solely of Jason singing and foot stomping out a beat. Occasionally he'd put down the accordion and pick up a guitar. No matter what, the listener was treated to his powerful deep voice (those easy comparisons to Tom Waits be damned) and his amusing entreaties to join in the fun.

Known as a performance artist, Jason is also a fine musician and a clever songwriter, penning introspective ballads to rowdy bar songs. He whipped the audience into a finger jiggling frenzy, feeling the

power, and tickling the armpits of their neighbors during a song called "I Want Music That Tears Itself Apart." During "Drinking Song" he asked everyone to point their index fingers in the air, look up and spin around 12 times, and promised "we'll all get very wasted."

All in all, Jason Webley gave a remarkable performance, an accordion-bearing minstrel who took his fellow travelers on a journey through happiness, sadness and looniness. For me, Jason was a priceless discovery whose music made my night!

The Dresden Dolls, the notorious Boston duo, formed mid-2000, and newly signed to Roadrunner Records, strode onstage, hand in hand, grinning ear to ear. With a flourish, they bowed to the audience, then Brian Viglione deferred to his lovely comrade Amanda Palmer. As they went to drums and piano respectively, it was just two normal people preparing to do battle with their demons.

Their set, although quite long, was both ear and eye catching, and not at all pretentious. Starting out with white painted faces and rosy cheeks, before they were halfway through, the makeup was gone, but the songs remained the same. Amanda's keyboard skills were impressive. She coaxed gentle tinkling notes from her piano, then pounced and pounded out thunderous power chords, all the while writhing around on her piano stool, barely able to stay grounded. Brian's drumming verged on melodic—capably playing with sticks, mallets and brushes, rising and sitting, mugging and grimacing.

Amanda is a strong woman with a strong voice. She slyly whispered a quiet little melody and then belled out a booming vocal attack. Her vocals were unique, deep and well tempered, from full-throated arias to snuffles and growls. Often she got the giggles over something she sang. Although many of their songs dealt with darkness and gloom, the Dolls looked like this was pure enjoyment at all times.

Of course they played "Coin Operated Boy," impressive in its tight, jerky robot glitches. Amanda questioned if there were any fans of George Bush in the house (a resounding no), then went on to render a spine-chilling interpretation of Black Sabbath's "War Pigs." To change the mood, and get up close and personal, both Amanda and Brian came to the front of the stage, Brian on guitar, to play a sensual, dark song called "Amsterdam," a huge crowd favorite. They also performed "Dirty Business," "Good Day," the punky "Girl Anachronism," the odd "Jeep Song" and some brand new material.

A quick intermission preceded an almost too long encore, which began with Jason Webley and Maya Viglione (Brian's sister) joining the Dolls for an impassioned sing along. It felt as if the encore equaled the show in length, but the energy from the audience seemed to power up

the Dolls, and they just kept going and going and going.

The Dresden Dolls were another unexpected surprise, not artsy-fartsy but really entertaining, as cerebral as you want with intelligent, poetic, neurotic, bizarre lyrics, and no-frills, gut-grabbing, meaningful music. Amanda and Brian were at all times precise and synergistic, true show(wo)men in every sense of the word. Be wary of the cabaret act and avant garde theatre comparisons. It puts the Dresden Dolls in a league, which isn't entirely appealing, almost like a novelty act. Just think in terms of an unlikely musical coupling that works impeccably well.



jason webley

