Something for everyone

*Simple Plan, 6th June, 2012.*

IT’S COLD. Very cold. And wet, and you’ve been sick all week. The doctor told you not to do it. You’ll probably only make the problem worse. But all you want to do is go out there and make the most of your first ever trip to this “Gong” place you’ve heard so much about. You just want to scream. You just want to jump.

Last night was a night for everyone. It was a night for the students – a much-needed pick-me-up midway through a stressful study recess. It was a night for the so-called ‘teenie-boppers’ – proud members of the pre-pubescent demographic that pop-punk so notoriously appeals to – and it was a night for the cool mums and embarrassing dads who, on more than one occasion, were caught demonstrating exactly why their kids had long gone into hiding, deep inside the sizeable crowd. But there was one man present at the UniHall last night who would have been forgiven for not enjoying himself at all. Pierre Bouvier, lead vocalist of *Simple Plan,* could easily have called in sick.

Outside could not have been further from a *Summer Paradise,* and for Pierre, this was increasingly turning into *The Worst Day Ever* (two puns in one sentence, thank you very much). But after being forced to call off Monday’s Newcastle show, no sore throat or headache was going to stop this one. So it was all systems go. And the results were unbelievable.

As the UniHall filled up and the heaters were turned on, it would be Sydney-based outfit *The Never Ever* to start us off. With some big supporting gigs in line for the power pop five-piece – opening for *Yellowcard* later in the year and having already played in *The Wonder Years’* Australian tour – their ability to star alongside big international acts was reassured. Showing off their latest EP, *Breathe,* the energetic performance and encapsulating lights show certainly did not resemble a band that is just two years old. They will leave Wollongong with more than a few additions to their growing social media following.

The diverse audience would then be treated to another display of the contemporary power pop genre – a group that has had significantly more time to mature on the international stage. *We The Kings,* however, formed in 2005, have only recently begun to revel in the significant Australian popularity that was experienced last night. With an unforgettable performance at Soundwave Festival 2011, and the 2008, now-platinum single *Check Yes, Juliet* only receiving regular rotation around the same time, it was clear that the five men from Florida had grown significantly in time for their second visit down under. Opening with the 2010 single *She Takes Me High* and with *Say You Like Me* continuing to energise the crowd, *Check Yes, Juliet* was of course saved until last. With the apparent sex-symbol vocalist Travis Clark repeatedly professing his love for Australian women, the closing number would undoubtedly ring in the minds of the teenage onlookers for some time to come.

Inevitably, however, the notorious Canadian headliners would take to the stage – to a resounding audience atmosphere. It seems odd to me that what was personally a blast from the past – an insight into numerous primary school afternoons spent in my bedroom, with *Welcome To My Life* at full volume – were to come less than a week after a much older memory-provoking experience; *S Club* had been the stars of the UniHall the previous Thursday. With those thoughts in mind, I was as enthusiastic as any to see the face of Pierre Bouvier – albeit a little worried about the performance of his illness-plagued voice box.
If ever my doubts could be put to bed, it was with the first note of *Simple Plan’s* opening hit, *Shut Up*. Unlike for the cancelled Newcastle show, it proved that they would be doing anything but; also satisfying the common hope that we would be treated to both the new and familiar throughout the night. There would be something for the gradually-going-mental teenie-boppers, right up to their parents. Something for everyone.

While *Addicted, Jump, Crazy* and the aforementioned *Welcome To My Life* proved to be, as expected, well-known hits with the crowd, the significant audience reaction was certainly not limited to *Simple Plan’s* two iconic early albums. A medley of the debut album *No Pads, No Helmets... Just Balls*, including choruses of several other early hits, was quite possibly not as well-received as the 2008 single *When I’m Gone* or 2011’s *Astronaut*. Indeed, two personal favourites were the recent radio tracks *Can’t Keep My Hands Off You* and *Summer Paradise* which, through the use of several large beach balls, thrown among the crowd, provided an intense feel-good atmosphere to the UniHall – perhaps simply a lyrical contrast to the atmosphere outside.

With a generous three-song encore, and having already displayed an extraordinary amount of tunes from their thirteen-year history, the five teenagers in thirty-something year-old bodies closed with one of the slowest and most emotional songs in their arsenal – *Perfect*. And as the fifteen hundred-strong crowd began to make their way out the doors, back into the drizzly rain, I can safely assume that for many, the night was just that.

So on behalf of the youngest teenie and the oldest hip mother in Wollongong last night, thanks a million Pierre. Thanks for not listening to your doctor.

Simon Masterton.