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Thursday, July 24, 2008

3 Gig Reviews: Mirrors Reunion in Cleveland + Wussy in N. Ky. + Vampire Weekend in Cincy
Category: [Music](#)

[Mirrors](#) / [Home and Garden](#) / [Rainy Day Saints](#)

Saturday July 19, 2008

Beachland Tavern (Cleveland, OH)

2008 has been an incredible summer for seminal indie-punk reunion gigs. I have been thrilled and blessed this summer to have caught outstanding (and improbable) performances by The Feelies, Mission of Burma, Half Japanese, Versus, and Great Plains (though I sadly missed gigs by The Vaselines and Wire that I really would like to have caught). But perhaps the most improbable—as well as the most unheralded—of the summer's many amazing reunion gigs took place on a pleasant July Saturday night at the homey and unpretentious [Beachland Tavern](#) in the Collinwood neighborhood on Cleveland's far east side. There, the nearly-original five-piece lineup of [Mirrors](#) (not "the Mirrors") featuring original members Jamie Klimek, Paul Marotta, Jim Crook, and Craig Bell (plus [Styrenes](#) drummer Paul Laurence, replacing the absent [Michael Weldon](#)) played together for the first time since September 1975. (A stripped-down trio version of [Mirrors](#) played some gigs in NYC and Cleveland—and released [an album](#)—in the late 1980s and early 1990s).

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Mirrors were perhaps the most Velvets-inspired band of the Cleveland punk explosion of the mid-1970s, and in many ways were not as avant-garde or experimental as contemporaries such as [Pere Ubu](#), [the Styrenes](#), or the [Electric Eels](#) (with all of whom [Mirrors](#) shared band members).

Led by singer/songwriter/lead guitarist [Jamie Klimek](#), [Mirrors](#) infused Velvets-style song-structure with heavy dollops of stunning protopunk grt-heroism and heart-on-the-sleeve sincerity. (The Velvets themselves played Cleveland fourteen times between 1968 and 1971, and the young Jamie Klimek is credited with having recorded some [legendary bootlegs](#) of a few of those gigs).

About Klimek's speedy and feedback-laden but subtle playing, Pagans singer [Mike Hudson](#) recently had this to say: "Cleveland had been blessed during the late '70s by the presence of four world-class guitar players—Mike Metoff, Cheetah Chrome, Jim Jones, and Jamie Klimek. I had the chance to play with them all and there was very little any of them couldn't do. Each had his own style and his own great strengths, but Jamie was far and away the most complex and musically trained of the bunch." [MIKE HUDSON, DIARY OF A PUNK](#) 108-09 (2008). More contemporary Velvets-influenced feedback-wielders such as [Ira](#)

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[Kaplan](#) and [Alan Licht](#) owe great debts of gratitude to Jamie Klimek.

Like his fellow (then-)youthful Velvets-fanatic [Jonathan Richman](#), Jamie Klimek seems to have understood the Velvets as being far more sincere and artless than later generations of listeners (who could only appreciate the Velvets through the lens of familiarity with Lou Reed's later artifice-laden solo material) could ever comprehend. Although they are not lacking in humor, nearly all of Klimek's songs—at their core—are heartfelt songs of love and romance. As [Julian Cope has noted](#): "the real strength [of Mirrors] is in Klimek's disarming vocals, which ain't like Lou at all and seem wholly original. . . . Klimek's his own man and he's spoken to by the Goddess, the great female, in a manner that the cynical sometime pseudo-homo Lou could never have approached. Indeed, from that angle Klimek's as much of an anti-Lou and Jonathan Richman's "I'm Straight" persona was. Klimek's songs are all girl songs, be they about dead Shirley, star-fucking wannabes Cindy, Cathy, Bobbie and Jackie, or impenetrable female mists both Classical and barbarian."

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Klimek retired from music in 1993, and prior to this gig had not stood on a stage while holding a



guitar in
15 years.
He is the
only
Mirror
who still
lives in

Cleveland: Marotta and Laurence now live in New York City; Bell in Indianapolis, and Crook in upstate New York. (Psychotronic Video publisher [Michael Weldon](#), Mirrors' original drummer, who did not participate in this reunion, now lives amongst the wild horses in Chincoteague Island, Virginia). The idea for this reunion gig took root earlier in 2008, when [former Mirrors bass player Jim Jones, who also played in Pere Ubu, died in Cleveland](#). At a memorial held at the Beachland Tavern in February 2008, members of [Mirrors](#) and [Home and Garden](#) (another Jones project) discussed staging a joint reunion gig to honor Jones, which came to fruition in July. Mirrors' members rehearsed individually for the gig, but were not able to practice together as a band until the very day of the gig.

A crowd of about 150 people showed up, including a few local celebs such as Bernie Joelson (of [Bernie and the Invisibles](#)), Johnny "Dromette" Thompson (Pere Ubu's longtime graphic artist who also owned/operated the [Drome Records](#) store and label), Steve-O and Dave Swanson (of [Death of Samantha](#)), [Scat Records](#) honcho [Robert Griffin](#), and longtime Cleveland rock critic [Anastasia Pantsios](#) (who [previewed the show](#) in

Cleveland's "Free Times" alt newsweekly). I have to say that I was a little disappointed that more old-school Cleveland punks didn't turn out, though. Where was [Peter Laughner's widow Charlotte Pressler](#)? Or [Jamie Klimek's own brother Andrew](#)—formerly the leader of [Ex Blank Ex](#)—who still lives in Cleveland? Where was [John Petkovic](#), who played in Cleveland with [Cobra Verde](#) the previous night? Where was [Mike Hudson](#), who lives just a few hours away in Niagara Falls? (I will give a pass to legendary hermit [Chris Stigliano](#), who has done perhaps more than anyone else to publicize '70s Clepunk over the decades, but who is known for never leaving his Sharon, PA environs). Other than Invisible Bernie and several members of the opening bands, I don't think that a single musician who ever recorded for Cleveland's legendary [Drome](#), [Hearpen](#), [Mustard](#), [Terminal](#), Herb Jackson, or St. Valentine's record labels was in attendance at the gig! (On the other hand, a dedicated Mirrors fan who plans to start a new label called "Violet Times" to issue a vinyl LP containing some old Mirrors recordings from the 1970s did travel all the way from Portland, Oregon to attend the gig—and landed up camping on the streets of Cleveland for two nights to do so!).

But maybe the lack of celebrity glitter in attendance was for the best: it made the show feel more authentically "Cleveland," and also reduced the pressure on the already-nervous Klimek. From the stage, Klimek was personable and funny, deadpanning reams of bullshit without any hint of guile (e.g. Klimek introduced drummer Paul Laurence—with whom Klimek performed in [Mirrors](#) and [the Styrenes](#) in the 1980s and 1990s—by announcing that "I just met him today, but he seems to know the songs"). But Klimek was also

somewhat fidgety: often his facial expressions disclosed some discomfort about performing, or some disappointment with the quality of his (or his bandmates') performances. On a few of Mirrors' best songs, however ("I Think I'm Falling", "Hands In My Pocket", "Shirley"), Klimek signaled with an introductory smile that he was ready to burn, and each time his smile was observed some stunning guitar soloing followed. (On those songs, the entire band was tight and scorching). In about 75 minutes, Mirrors got through the lions' share of their catalogue, and then were finished, probably never to play together again (although Klimek has written a few new songs).

It was a pleasure and a privilege to have attended this show, and well worth the 500-mile roundtrip drive. Mirrors are truly part of punk rock's secret history, and this unexpected, unpretentious, low-key, low-profile, high-quality, hard-rocking reunion was as historical as it was secretive! In a summer in which so many other old-school punk/indie reunion gigs are (deservedly) attracting a lot of attention, I didn't want to let this one pass totally unnoticed.

Both opening bands—each of which contained some Cleveland rock royalty—were pretty good. [Home and Garden](#) are sort-of a way-station for former [Pere Ubu](#) members; in fact, by my lights [Home and Garden](#) contains more [Pere Ubu](#) members than the current version of [Pere Ubu](#) does! However, H&G unfortunately lack David Thomas's formidable songwriting skills, and none of their own material really engaged me as much as when they covered "Laughing" by Pere Ubu (though for all I know the members of H&G may have played as much of a role in writing that great song as David Thomas himself). [Rainy Day](#)

[Saints](#) are a longstanding '60s Rock/powerpop combo led by former of [Death of Samantha](#) guitarist Dave Swanson, who were quite fun to listen to but also suffer somewhat from a lack of memorable songs.

Wussy w/ The Championship

Thurs March 6, 2008

The Keystone Bar & Grill (Covington, KY)

On a pleasant winter night in Northern Kentucky, I attended one of the four Cincinnati-area gigs being performed within six weeks by the Queen City's finest band, [Wussy](#), the mixed-gender quartet (part-[Velvets](#), part-[Vaselines](#), part-[Neil Young](#), part-[Love Child](#), part-[Dead Moon](#)) that is the current project featuring ex-[Ass Pony](#) (and local luminary) Chuck Cleaver. This flurry of local activity was designed to allow the local heroes to test out some new material, and also to prepare them for their forthcoming road trip to [SXSW](#) in Texas, to be immediately followed by their second-ever [spate of east coast tour dates](#).



This gig took place at a new venue, [The Keystone Bar & Grill](#) in

Covington, Kentucky. I'd never been there before (at least since the excellent [Sonoma restaurant](#), which used to inhabit the same space, closed down a while back). And frankly, I was a little alarmed when Wussy bassist Mark Messerly [noted in the band's blog](#) that [the Keystone's Myspace site](#) portrays the club as "a nice place with lots of young energetic people acting energetically." Which I guess was a euphemistic way of saying that the club portrays itself as a haunt for overaged fratboys and feather-haired ex-sorority girls on the make, and also for the handful of "upscale" (the Keystone's word, not mine) yuppies who toil in Northern Kentucky's nearby three-block corporate office-tower district.

It turns out that Wussy organized this gig as a favor to a slightly gay dad-rock band from Milwaukee called "[The Championship](#)" who had apparently begged for help in scoring a last-minute Cincy-area gig. Although "The Championship" had their moments, my advice to them would be to come out of the closet, lean heavier on their underutilized Bowie influence, lighten up on their overdone Uncle Tupelo influence, and play fewer songs.

The gig received essentially no advertising, and was not even mentioned in [the Citybeat article that cited Wussy's next-night gig at Southgate House as a pick-of-the-week](#). Accordingly, the audience was limited to roughly 30 dedicated readers of Wussy's blog, 15-20 apparent Keystone "regulars" (i.e. thirtysomething stockbroker-types and Jessica Simpson knockoffs, some wearing expensive painters' caps), and frontwoman Lisa Walker's parents, in from Muncie, Indiana for the show. This audience was smaller than Wussy usually draws in metro Cincinnati, but filled the

small room comfortably.

Wussy took the stage around midnight, just minutes after The Championship finished their opening set and Lisa Walker simultaneously arrived in the building. (The rest of the band had been there for hours, as had Lisa's parents). Although guitarist/singer Chuck Cleaver (ex-Ass Ponys) was suffering from a recently-torn Achilles tendon and also had just lost a lens out of his [drugstore-generic reading glasses](#) (without which he could not write or read the band's setlist), the venerable old pro (and the rest of the band) hit the ground running.

With a diffident stage presence that belied the confidence and verve with which they performed their brilliant songs, Wussy ripped through about four songs apiece from [their two indispensable albums](#), and also debuted about half a dozen new originals never previously performed in public. The new originals all sounded good to me, though I will need to hear them again to decide whether they measure up to Wussy's previous impeccable output. The selection of older songs focused mainly on Wussy's best and most popular material. Of these, the highlights included an anthemic new [Mekons](#)-like drum-attack/arrangement which breathed fresh life into Wussy's signature tune "Yellow Cotton Dress" (already a picture-perfect ode to infatuation that had not appeared to be susceptible of improvement); a wide-open performance of "Airborne" in which Chuck and Lisa seemed to simultaneously cut loose on separate [Ira Kaplan](#)-like guitar solos, creating a symphonic crescendo that would have put a smile on [Rhys Chatham](#)'s face; and the set-closing rave-up "Rigor Mortis" which brought to mind what [Mission of Burma](#) might have sounded like if they had ever been

willing to sing about their troubles.

Wussy are a great band that is only getting greater. If you get a chance to see them, take it.

Vampire Weekend

The Gypsy Hut (Cincinnati, OH)

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

As of January 25, 2008, I'd never heard of [Vampire Weekend](#). But when I took a quick January 26 foray into NYC, it seemed as though all of Gotham was buzzing about Vampire Weekend's allegedly fresh and infectious hybrid between African music and [The Feelies](#) (or maybe the [Talking Heads](#)). In Brooklyn, I was shown [a youtube video for the band's signature tune "A Punk,"](#) which struck me as borderline enough that the band might potentially be either good or awful. One clever pal did express a prescient note of skepticism, warning me that Vampire Weekend at their best sounded like [Paul Simon's "Graceland,"](#) and at their worst sounded like every generic English ska band from the 1980s.

When I returned to Cincy the next day, I stopped by [Shake It Records](#) to pick up the new [Bonnie Prince Billy](#) live CD "[Wilding In The West.](#)" While there, the shopkeeper told me that he had just received 200 tix for Vampire Weekend's semi-secret Cincy gig, which

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would take place on Wed Feb 13 in the [Gypsy Hut](#), the smallest venue of the band's hyped and sold-out national tour. Having just spending a whole NYC weekend hearing people gush about this band of recent Columbia grads, it seemed like my inescapable karma to buy a pair of tix to go see them.

As Feb 13 approached, the local hype intensified. On the day of the gig, [my pal Al](#) (to whom I had given my second ticket) was offered \$150 for the pair (I had paid \$20). In what seems like the most compelling argument in favor of getting a cell phone that I've yet experienced, Al passed up this golden opportunity because he didn't know whether I would have wanted to sell the tix. (I would have). So we went to the gig on a freezing and snowy Cincinnati weeknight.

I had never been to the [Gypsy Hut](#) before, and somewhat hope that I have no occasion to go there again. It was basically an unheated small concrete room, stark and empty, more long than wide, with mediocre sound and a very low stage, [nestled under the I-75 expressway](#). What this meant was that despite this being the smallest venue of Vampire Weekend's tour, in the packed room it was basically impossible to see the band and not ideal for hearing them either. (Admittedly, my fave venue [Maxwell's](#) could be accused of suffering from the same long-room, low-stage issues, but [Maxwell's](#) always had excellent sound and it also has

risers on the sides and in the back that help provide viewing opportunities. Plus, people in Hoboken aren't as tall as people in Cincinnati. and [Maxwell's](#) is heated in the wintertime).

When the band started playing, I almost couldn't believe how lame they sounded. Tinny, precious, phony, limp, weak, fey, corporate, boring, annoying: all of those words sprang instantly to mind. By the second song, [my pal Al](#) was agitating to leave. Aware of the hype, I insisted on staying for a few more songs, on the theory that some of their material must be better than this. But by song 6, the suck factor was undeniable and the cold was taking its toll and out the door I went, the first time I've walked out on a headline band less than halfway through their set in many many years.

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[Jon Lorenz](#)



 Online Now!

Ha..You totally should have sold those tickets. I'm not sure what the buzz is either. i actually saw them like two months before this open up for dirty projectors at publico where no one gave a shit about the band. Now everyone loves them. Weird??

Posted by [Jon Lorenz](#) on Mar 21, 2008 3:48 PM
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[Tim Gilbride](#)



Ken, regarding the Mirrors review, Charlotte has lived out of state for years and John Petkovic was indeed in attendance. It was a blast seeing Mirrors - I've had a couple tapes of their stuff for probably 20 years. T i m

Posted by [Tim Gilbride](#) on Jul 26, 2008 7:23 PM
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