

LIVE

in the clubs



SOMA Holiday

SOMA HOLIDAY, RED HOUSE PAINTERS, CARLOS!

January 21st, Covered Wagon, SF
Millbrae's Carlos! was the first of three bands at the Covered Wagon on a bitter, South of Market Tuesday night. And despite a small crowd (due partially to the early hour, partially to the cold), the trio played a charming and rocking set of its mutating form of Love Rock. Previously (I last saw these guys a few months ago), Carlos! possessed distinct Love Rock characteristics—a knobby rhythm section, fuzzy/warbling guitar, and whiney-kid vocals—and sounded as if at any moment the flimsy rubber bands holding the group together might snap, sending each member careening away in his own direction. On this night, though, Carlos! displayed more maturity as an ensemble, moving slightly away from childish rattling to become a tighter (almost) power trio. Much of the material was still kind of simplistic, but the band kept it interesting with little rhythm hiccups and cute lyrics, like on the group's single, an ode to "Saturday," or, as with "Mountain," by adding some punk/ska flavor. By the time Carlos! finished, there were a few more people in attendance to be blown away by the fierce, relentless, Nomeansno-ish encore.

Mark Kozelek, frontman for the second band, the Red House Painters, seemed a bit dazed, like a

**CONCERT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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punch-drunk fighter, and the rest of the band played a hypnotic, swelling, moody, almost ambient accompaniment to his pain and confusion. The House Painters have often been compared to fellow San Franciscans American Music Club (indeed, revered AMC songwriter Mark Eitzel is an RHP fan), and to some extent, that comparison is valid, although AMC is musically more engaging and, where Eitzel crawls under your skin, the Red House Painters attempt to slowly rub that skin off and expose your raw nerves. Sometimes Kozelek's lyrics recall Eitzel's ("She's got that half-dead look in her eyes/She worries about me"), and sometimes there's absolutely no resemblance ("Mother, I want you to pay attention to my bellybutton/Mother, I want bobby pins stuck in

my ears"). In performance, the Red House Painters didn't move about much. Besides the half-hearted intermittent prancing of guitarist Gordon Mack, Kozelek was the focus. Early in the set, Kozelek missed a few odd notes (which was actually quite endearing), then got warmer as the evening progressed. Drummer Anthony Kout and bassist Jerry Vessel were most animated and involved in "Strawberry Hill" (gentle, but with a serious undertow) and the building, cataclysmic "Mother."

The oddly chosen SOMA Holiday wrapped up the three-band bill. They may have taken their name from a drug in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, but (in this town at least) the moniker rings forced and pretentious, just like the band. SOMA Holiday played textured, arty, un-hooky pop straight out of the mid-'80s school of 4AD wannabes. The band's keyboard player/vocalist's low, inflectionless voice was a bit too high in the mix, which (along with the whole band's distractingly cavalier attitude) made it difficult to appreciate the musicians' rich ensemble playing. The band did, however, hit some higher points: several songs boasted a rumbling undercurrent beneath their smooth-as-glass finish to remind the (now sizeable) audience that although SOMA Holiday might be glossy and high-tech, they weren't totally empty techno.

—Seana Baruth



Red House Painters

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