

## The Old 97's – July 7<sup>th</sup> – Southgate House

by Alexandra Lander, 2004

I am certain Johnny Cash was smiling down from heaven as the Old 97's rocked the Southgate House on July 7<sup>th</sup>. He was the band's chief musical influence and his song ("The Wreck of the Old 97") the inspiration for their name. They took his roots-country style into a new generation, adding a dash of catchy pop, a sprinkle of alt-country, and some killer Tex-rock on speed. You can't ever listen to their CDs without cranking up the volume as high as you can stand it, and after just one listen, you hear their catchy choruses echoing in your head for a week. Seeing them live is an absolute must, as affirmed by a packed out venue of fans ranging from ages nineteen to fifty (I haven't seen that much gray hair at a concert since the Grateful Dead).

When the Texas-based band takes the stage, one has to chuckle at such a motley bunch. Front and center is Rhett Miller, the beautiful front man that could easily be the star of the next Gap commercial; bass player Murry Hammond, an affable, country version of Buddy Holly; lead guitarist Ken Bethea, who looks like your slouching, college dorm roommate, and drummer Philip Peeples—who could be their fifteen-year-old little brother. They couldn't *be* more different. But when they all commence to rockin', they are a musical powerhouse. At various times during the show, amid searing guitar solos, heart-thumping drum licks and Rhett thrashing around in between, they seemed oblivious of the audience and just slipped into the blissful musicians' "zone."

The show included some new songs from their forthcoming LP, *Drag It Up*, and the rest was a blaze of crowd pleasers like "King of All the World," "Barrier Reef," "Murder (or a Heart Attack)," and "Crash on the Barrel Head." The grinding, opening guitar riff of "Jagged" started every head in the room bobbing, and bodies slowly began to groove. At the midpoint of the show, Miller wiped the sweat from his face and murmured, "It's getting *hot*." Boy was it. In more ways than one. I thought I saw smoke coming off the strings of Bethea's guitar, and maybe a little steam coming from the girls in the front row, who wished they were the guitar on Rhett Miller's swaying hips.

The band threw in a couple of their earlier and more twangy songs, sung by Hammond and brought to life by Miller's howling vocals that weaved in and out of the melody. The last of which went on and on in a driving, almost surfer-rock fashion.

For the encore, Rhett Miller did some of his solo work. The man can belt out songs with the reckless abandon and vocal inflection of a kid on a swing in the backyard who doesn't care if anyone's listening. Then Hammond joined him in their alter-ego group The Rancho Brothers for a number, and finally the rest of the band came out for a generous finish. Afterward, the crowd marched out into the streets of Newport satiated, content, and psyched up for the long ride home.

The Old 97's new LP, *Drag It Up*, comes out on July 27<sup>th</sup>. If you're a fan, add it to your collection. If you're new to the band, check it out. It'll be worth every cent and will most likely stay in your CD player for a week.

### Set List

(song from new CD)

King of All the World  
Buick City Complex  
Smokers (new)  
The New Kid (new)  
Busted Afternoon  
Drowning in the Days  
W. TX Teardrops  
Jagged  
(song from new CD)  
Wish The Worst  
Crash On the Barrel Head  
Murder (or a Heart Attack)  
Barrier Reef  
(song from new CD)  
Mama Tried  
Niteclub  
Doreen

Encore

Question  
Come Around (R. Miller)  
Valentine  
Old Familiar Steam  
Rollerskate Skinny  
If My Heart Was a Car