

TRIUMPH OVER ADVARSITY

: VARSITY DRAG AT THE PORTLAND ARMS :

WORDS: DAN THORNTON

DESIGN: ANDREW CAMPBELL

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANGUS FARQUHAR



AGE WON'T WEARY ONE UNSUNG HERO OF U.S. PUNK POP, AS HIS NEW BAND TAKES ON A LOW-BUDGET TOUR OF EUROPE.

There's an informal, almost 'invite-only' air to the tiny back room venue of the Portland Arms. It takes a certain type of fan to have tracked the movements of Varsity Drag lead singer Ben Deily since his departure from The Lemonheads almost 20 years ago. But if his departure preceded the rise of acoustic hippy Evan Dando to star status, Deily's mournful pop-punk odes to unrequited love have a cult status which endured throughout his absence from

"HE MIGHT HAVE A DAY JOB IN ADVERTISING, BUT DEILY'S VOICE STILL EPITOMISES TEENAGE ANGST, UNREQUITED LOVE, AND REGRET IN A MANNER UNMATCHED BY BANDS HALF HIS AGE."

recording – save for Pods, which lasted from 1992-1994.

But now he's back, and bringing with him the same high tempo pop-punk melodies that made him the unsung hero of the early Lemonheads albums. He might have a day job in advertising, but Deily's voice still epitomises teenage angst, unrequited love, and regret in a manner unmatched by bands half his age. And the rest of Varsity Drag have got his back, with the Mohican-sporting school vice principal Will Anderson on bass, and long-haired, bespectacled and shirtless drummer Ian Miller exhausting himself to maintain the high-speed rhythm.

It's almost a surreal homecoming for Deily, who grew up in Cambridge, albeit Cambridge, Massachusetts. Following a late start, and one support act reduced from five piece to a solo act by a bass player stuck on the motorway, there's a sense of urgency to make it through much of the new album and still include the classics. But that doesn't stop some comedic interludes between Deily and Anderson, obviously both enjoying the delights of touring cheap lodgings around Europe.

Stand out tunes from the new album, *'For Crying Out Loud'*, are the power trio of *'Skinny Ties'*, *'Billy Ruane'*, and *'Miles of Ocean'*. All three are honed and crafted slices of punk guitars, thumping bass and pounding drums, topped with poetic vocals. All three match the earlier *'Ever'* and *'7 Powers'*, and inspire as much singing and dancing in the crowd. In fact, you can almost see the years being stripped from the more middle-aged members of the audience in a way make-up companies would kill for.

The only chance to grab a breath is when Deily takes the mic alone for *'Postcard'*, a beautiful and emotive eulogy to a departed love. And when he sings "I know it won't go on as such, but I'll hope we'll keep in touch", a roomful of fans, both new and old, is hoping he means it.

BEN DEILY SPEAKS...



DM: "Why on earth did you decide to tour Europe in the middle of Winter?"

BD: "We released the album in the summer of 2006, and after years of asking, a crazy German called Florian offered to arrange a tour but it would take six months, putting us in January. That fell through, but Aston, the boss of our label Boss Tuneage stepped in, and arranged it instead."

DM: "Do you still get nervous, even after all this time?"

BD: "Not any more. What's the worst they can do to me? Even if people shout things, it's fun and encouraging. The only thing that scares me is going to places like Wakefield tomorrow and not knowing if we'll find a place for everyone to stay."

DM: "What's your favourite song to play live?"

BD: "*7 Powers* is a really good song to play. It's a draw between that and *Skinny Ties*. But I'm getting to like playing *Postcard*. We've never really played it live, even in The Lemonheads."

DM: "Seeing as you work in advertising as your day job, what would be the taglines for Ben Deily?"

BD: "Now I'm on the spot. I try and think of some and put them on my website (www.bendeily.com), but I'm struggling now. How about: "Ben Deily – he means you no harm"

Varsity Drag's album 'For Crying Out Loud' is out now, available on Boss Tuneage record (www.bosstuneage.com). For Pods CD's and the latest news, visit www.bendeily.com or join the Drag at www.myspace.com/varsitydrag.

