Atmosphere permeates Philadelphia
By Brandi Lukas

Minnesota’s rhyme and beat masters Atmosphere gave the ugly fans of Philadelphia a reason to celebrate themselves at the Trocadero in May by supplying a night full of musical anecdotes and self-pride.

Atmosphere headlined this sold out concert during its “When God Gives You Ugly Tour” to promote the reissue of its 2002 release *God Loves Ugly*, which has been out of print for over a year, and the success of its latest album *When Life Gives You Lemons*.

Fifteen minutes before the Trocadero doors opened, Sean “Slug” Daley of Atmosphere greeted the fans in line, with posing for pictures, shaking hands, and fist-bumping. The fans chanted “Slug” as Daley made his way down the line.

Starting off this three-set celebratory performance was Attracted To Gods, a metal band with an essence of blues and country sound. They were surely an unexpected opener for an underground hip-hop concert, yet held their own, for the crowd responded positively. Nate Collins, who is also Atmosphere’s guitarist, delivered raspy and fierce vocals and much talent on the guitar. Attracted to Gods closed out their set with a lengthy jam session, which left the fans in a consumed state.

Brother Ali was next to grace the crowd, but on a more personal level. In between beats and rhymes, Brother Ali told bits and pieces.

Summer might be synonymous with the beach and the ballpark, but while those are great, summer concerts and festivals are a big part of the season, as well. One can see their favorite artists and learn about a slew of others. This summer, the Tower Theater in Upper Darby, Pa. housed the Progressive Nation 2009 Tour.

Progressive, also known as prog, is a type of music that is categorized by its influences in everything from classical to jazz and ranging improvisation. Most artists’ songs range around the 20-minute mark. While it is not a tremendously popular genre, progressive rock and metal have become a cult phenomenon in recent years, and have been able to engender a festival such as Prog Nation.

Opening the 2009 Tour was Scale the Summit, a young group from Houston that uses seven and eight-string guitars and has no vocals. Quite simply, they do not need any. In the 30-minute set the band displayed sonic ferocity and atmospheric music that reminded the audience of a harder-edged version of fellow instrumental metalers, Pelican.

Following Scale the Summit was Bigelf, which hearken back a classic rock sound with some excellent melody. Bigelf vocalist Damon Fox played a vintage Hammond Organ while the band used tube amps and a four-piece drum kit to perform songs off last year’s underrated album, *Cheat the Gallows*. The only disappointing thing about their set was that they only played a short 30 minutes.

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Progressive Nation delivers rock assault
By Amanda Myers

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Album reviews of indie favorites p.2
Summer heat provides wave of new music

**ALBUM REVIEWS**

**MODEST MOUSE**

*No One’s First, and You’re Next*  
**EPIC**

*By Joe Rey*

With over 16 years of experimentation under their belt, it is no surprise that Modest Mouse has finally released a collection of B-sides and unreleased tracks for their ever-growing fan base. *No One’s First, and You’re Next* is a mix of six years worth of tinkering, and it shows. While this album may not have any chart topping singles such as “Float On” and “Dashboard,” distinctive vocals and ever-changing pace takes you on a ride through a cross sample of their last few albums. Despite the erratic pace and sometimes jarring transitions, the album creates an intimate and almost improvised feel. Songs such as “Satellite Skin” and “King Rat” have the potential to be hits, but it is clear that this EP was made first and foremost to experiment. Fans will appreciate the departure from the band’s more mainstream sound and see their new EP as a backstage pass to a well recorded jam session.

**MEW**

*No More Stories Are Told Today Sorry...*  
**SONY BMG**

*By Aaron Lefkowitz*

Following up the gorgeous gloom-tinged melancholy of 2005’s *...And the Glass Handled Kites* for Danish dream pop/shoegaze trio Mew was no easy feat, and with the four year gap since that album considered, the band has done surprisingly well with *No More Stories Are Told Today Sorry...*. Whereas *...Kites* found Mew exploring more darker territories of their sound, *No More Stories...* shows a happier, and according to lead singer/guitarist Jonas Bjerre, more “dancier” Mew. Mew’s sound still retains its love for beautifully intricate melodies, harmonious vocals, wonderfully expansive and well-layered production, and odd mixtures of Yes-ish prog-rock and My Bloody Valentine’s dreamy shoegaze textures. Like all of Mew’s albums, *No More Stories...* is a lot to take in at first, but repeated listens reveal this album to be a true piece of ear candy.

**NOISETTES**

*Wild Young Hearts*  
**MERCURY**

*By Brandi Lukas*

London’s pop-punk rock trio, Noisettes, pick up where it left off, from its 2007 debut release What’s the Time Mr. Wolf? and withstood the curse of the often-lackluster sophomore album. The Noisettes abandoned its edgier punk sound and fierce vocals for a more sophisticated tone. *Wild Young Hearts* covers a wide range of sounds throughout many decades of music. “Never Forget You” supplies a dose of elegance and worldliness with orchestral segments and a tropical beat. On the other hand, “Don’t Upset the Rhythm” encompasses an 80s-inspired pop sound through playful vocals and twangy guitars. Noisettes also include the disappointments and feats of love in a slower pace through sensual subjects in “24 Hours” and “Cheap Kicks.” *Wild Young Hearts* prove that a sophomore album and a sound change do not always have to be a flop.

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**Atmosphere**

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pieces of his life story about growing up an albino in the Midwest. That’s right – an albino rapper, and a very impressive one. Brother Ali touched the hearts of many fans with his stories, and entertained with jokes about selling his son so he could move to Philadelphia. Ali wooed the crowd with tracks “Truth Is,” “Uncle Sam Goddamn,” and “Freedom Ain’t Free,” along with his soothingly raspy voice, reminding the crowd to lose their body and mind in the beat.

Anchoring this glorifying gig was Atmosphere with an 18-song set and six-song encore. Hidden underneath a reflective jacket, Slug shifty and modestly took the stage. Atmosphere won over the fans with a fantastical entrance; performing tracks “Godlovesugly,” “One of a Kind,” and “Puppets,” Slug lost the concealing jacket and opened up to the audience revealing his Philly pride with a Jim’s Steaks t-shirt.

Slug’s sensitive side came out when he performed tearjerker’s “Painting,” “Yesterday” and “Guarantees” in the middle of the set, and all in a row. The show took a turn when he offered the fans two options during “Modern Man’s Hustle” – either sing along if you know the words, and if you don’t, make out with the person next to you.

With its reasserting and realistic lyrics and scenarios, Atmosphere gave the crowd a reason to really love life through the track “Lovelifed.” Shortly after, Slug and Ant pumped out a Carly Simon cover before jumping into “Vanity Sick” and ending with “Heaven.” Atmosphere re-entered the stage with an unforgettable encore. The crowd was rowdy with the anger-provoking track “Trying to Find a Balance,” which was followed by the soothing “Always Coming Back Home to You.” The crowd was surprised when Brother Ali and Philadelphia rapper Freeway joined Atmosphere on the stage for freestyle, which housed fun-loving lyrics and humor concerning Philadelphia sports teams. They each took a turn with the mic, and ultimately wooed the fans with the impressiveness of their impromptu rhymes. Ending this celebratory set was eye-opening and life-altering song “Sunshine.”

Without a doubt, Atmosphere’s sold-out Philadelphia show went beyond expectation. There could not have been a more opportune time to celebrate oneself than beside a diverse crowd and through great music.
Hundreds of earplug-laden Dinosaur Jr. fans braved an awfully humid New York City day to line up early outside the Rumsey Playfield at Central Park for the veteran alternative rock band. In addition, The Walkmen was on the bill, an ever blossoming product of Brooklyn’s own, and Saviours, a heavy metal/thrash metal group from Oakland, Calif.

The show marked the last date on the calendar for Central Park’s SummerStage, a series of free outdoor programs providing a wide range of music, film, dance and spoken word during the summer months, now in its 23rd year.

The Saviours kicked off its set with Gibson Flying V’s and Explorers and atypical metal poise. Saviours play a brand of heavy metal akin to early new wave of British heavy metal groups, such as Motörhead and Venom, as well as combining a few thrash metal elements from early Metallica and Slayer and with a bit of psychedelic metal. Despite sticking out like a sore thumb on the bill, Saviours were able to get a few heads bangin’ in the first dozen rows of people and held the interest of many others.

The next band up was The Walkmen, who has indeed come a long way from the burgeoning NYC indie rock scene at the start of the decade. Propelled by four positively received studio albums and singles such as “The Rat,” “Louisiana” and “In the New Year,” The Walkmen have certainly proved themselves to be a notable face in the crowd.

The band’s set list mainly consisted of songs from their 2008 album You & Me, which showed the band embracing its usual flare for organic instrumentation. It also included some captivating solemn balladry and Latin-tinged bluesy numbers, and a few older staples like “We’ve Been Had” and “Little House of Savages.” Many were in awe at lead singer/vocalist Hamilton Leithauser’s raw vocal talent, whose veins were visibly popping out of his neck during songs like “Canadian Girl” and “I Lost You,” both of which also featured great use of an accompanying horn section. The Walkmen walked off with a loud ovation and left many wanting more.

The stage was now set for headliner Dinosaur Jr. to perform. Behind the stage was a backdrop of the cover for their new album Farm, whose artwork has already become a fan favorite. The band is currently in support of its new album, Farm, which dropped this past June, and it is the second release since Mascis reformed the band in 2005 with original members Lou Barlow and Murph.

Farm further solidifies Dinosaur Jr.’s use of crushing distortion mixed with catchy songwriting and extensive soulful melodic guitar solos courtesy of Mascis that have earned them their “alternative rock gods” status since first making their mark back in 1987 with their classic You’re Living All Over Me album.

Dinosaur Jr. romped through a 70-minute set, which featured six songs from their new album, including the already well loved “I Want You to Know” and “Over It” as well as healthy dosage of older favorites like “The Wagon,” “Out There,” “Feel the Pain,” and “Freak Scene.” The highlight of the show came toward the end when the band really started to pick up steam with the closing duo of their infamous cover of The Cure’s “Just Like Heaven,” and the heavy fuzzed-out riffage of “Sludgefeast.” Unfortunately, the band was having so much fun that they lost track of time and had to cut out a few songs from the original set. With all the excitement considered, Central Park’s SummerStage series couldn’t have picked a more fitting band to close out its 2009 calendar.
While Scale the Summit and Bigelf rocked the night, Zappa Plays Zappa was the unanimous show stealer for the crowd at the Tower Theatre. Zappa Plays Zappa, as the name implies, is Dweezil Zappa playing the music of his late father, Frank Zappa. During the 80-minute set the band played everything from classic instrumental compositions to Zappa favorites, such as “Dirty Love” and “Bamboozled by Love.” The relatively unknown backing band did a tremendous job of keeping the music alive for a man who was taken far too soon.

Finally, at 10:20 p.m., headliners and founders of Progressive Nation, Dream Theater took the stage. After 20 years of touring, these guys still know how to put on an amazing show, complete with HD TVs, a huge projector and a keyboard solo that involved an iPhone. While there were many positives to this performance, there were also a couple of downsides. For instance, for a band that has released 10 studio albums, a 90-minute set is too short for a show, especially when the average song is between seven to 10 minutes long.

Due to the short set, the band mainly focused on their early days and their more current songs. The audience would have enjoyed hearing music from the middle part of their career, which would have included tracks from their 1999 masterpiece Metropolis Part Two: Scenes from a Memory and their 2002 album Six Degrees of Inner Turbulence. A song from their polarizing 2007 album Systematic Chaos was performed to fill in the gap. While it was not one of the three-hour shows that the band is known for, it would have been nice to hear a broader career perspective from a band that is arguably the most popular in the progressive metal genre.

Overall, this was one of the better progressive rock shows in a while. All the bands were impressive and the crowd reacted well to them and really got into the atmosphere. It is also refreshing to see progressive rock and metal get the attention it deserves.

This past summer I saw over 45 artists, roughly a $200 value, for free. How? Donating some of my time and making contacts. One good way to get a bulk of free live music is to volunteer. Volunteering for big festivals not only guarantees free music, but also often supplies you with membership opportunities.

Another successful way of getting into concerts is contacting artists’ promoters. Their job is to preach the greatness of these artists to the public. As long as you have something to offer in order to get the word out about the band, you have a solid chance of being on the guest list.

Next time you think about seeing an artist live, see what you can do before spending money on a ticket. It is not always going to work, but it will be worth it in the end, and will make out for a cool experience.