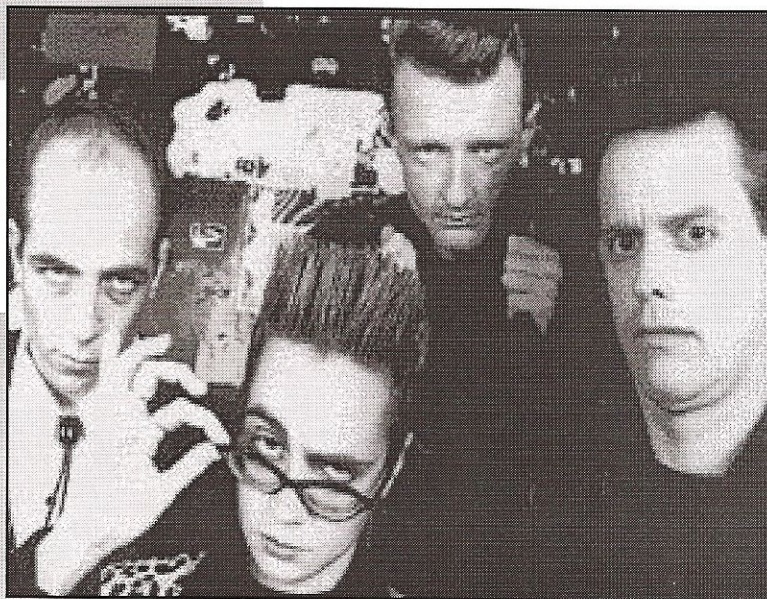


The Flametricks Subs

The Black Cat Lounge, Austin, TX

live reviews.

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In the middle of Sixth Street, Austin's main music strip, hides a tiny, decrepit club called The Black Cat Lounge. In the eighties, the Black Cat was a favorite haunt of the Hell's Angels and other bikers. On any given night, there would be ten to twenty hogs parked outside, and if you paid the cover charge, the bartenders would supply you with all the hot-dogs and Lone Star beer you could eat and drink. The number of hot dogs and bikes has dwindled in recent years, however, and the Black Cat is experiencing a renaissance of sorts. This rebirth is credited to the loyalty of a few bands, the most influential of which is The Flametricks Subs.

The toilet in the open courtyard behind the stage still overflows every night and the Lone Star still flows just as freely, but the clientele has changed. On Saturday nights, just before midnight, the rockabilly kats and kittens begin to gather. The men saunter and menace in their vintage boots and ribbed, white, tank tops—worn to display taut arms consumed by tattoos. The women flick their hips and wear clothing ranging from dominatrix black vinyl to Bettie Page shorts and bikini tops to school-girl pink cashmere. At midnight, The Flametricks Subs—Buster Crash on vocals and guitar, Clem Hoot on lead guitar, Peggy Suicide on upright bass,

and Johnny Cat on drums—take the stage. The pompadours and recklessly dyed curls begin to bounce among the coiffures of non-hipsters. The Flametricks Subs play hard-core psychobilly, a version of rockabilly resembling Hank Williams and Bobby Fuller musical stylings but with lyrics that would make even Elvis blush.

Their melodies are creepy and infectious, and soon the entire club is raising longnecks in salute as they observe the festering of southern culture portrayed in a spasm of insouciant rockabilly glory. Buster croons and growls as the floor lights and his worn baseball cap work together to highlight his evil but despondent stare. Clem just grins at Buster as if he can't believe his buddy has made this transformation. Peggy plays her bass expertly, which seems to take all her concentration. But Johnny is the one to watch. He is, by far, the most comfortable on stage and is almost seductive as he makes blatant gestures with his drum sticks and Shiner longneck. The Flametricks Subs rip through songs about evil voodoo women, cattle, and the possibilities provided by x-ray glasses as the patrons jerk their heads in time and a few bizarre individuals attempt to swing to the rapid beat. I always find myself entranced by the gestures of the musicians and the decor of the stage.

The stage is tiny; if you need to answer the call of nature, you have to walk dangerously close to it and duck Clem's swinging guitar neck. On the left side of the stage, a television monitor plays pseudo-porno from the fifties and sixties. Behind the musicians, a trio or sometimes a quartet of women who call themselves Satan's Cheerleaders dance. They wear tight, plastic, black and red cheerleading dresses that do nothing to conceal their numerous tattoos. They lead chants of "BEER!...RUN!" and bend and kick to better display the creepings of their black fishnet stockings. The Satan's Cheerleaders only enhance the erotic, seedy atmosphere created by Buster et al.

The total effect of a Flametricks Subs show is one of manic energy, alcoholic hallucination, and dirty sex. It is not a show, it is an event. This may explain why I could be found there every Saturday night this summer. I highly recommend going to see the show if you happen to be in Austin and have the stomach for it—just don't go alone. (The Flametricks Subs can be found on the Teen Rebel Records label or can be heard during Vivian's radio show for KDIC, eight to ten Saturday nights.)
-Vivian Curtis