

The Thieves in New York

The Continental, NYC – September 15, 2005

by Michael Walls

So, after almost a full year of listening to their music and after writing two album reviews – I finally got to see The Thieves play live. It was CMJ night at The Continental in New York and The Thieves were scheduled to play early, so even though it was a school night, I really had no excuse not to make the trek to the city.

It was a hot, sticky night. By the time I got to the city and subways it uptown to Chris Orcutt's place, my shirt was soaked with sweat. NYC subways really suck in the summer. We drank a couple of beers at Chris' while I let my shirt dry out in front of the A/C.

Next we headed to Times Square to meet up with Mike Webb at some sort of *Nation Magazine* political happy hour at a swanky restaurant. Lots of political geeks ranting on about Judge Roberts and political aspects of Hurricane Katrina – but it was an open bar with nice appetizers and I hadn't eaten any dinner yet, so all was good. Also, Webb was introducing me to these political geeks as the "Editor of 2 Walls Webzine, a social commentary website". Which seemed to impress people and prompted them to pointedly ask me what "side" I was on regarding various issues. To which I replied that I didn't believe in "sides" – which usually got me a laugh and off the hook.

I finally dragged Orcutt and Webb out at 8pm, as the Thieves were scheduled for 8:30pm and we needed to get downtown. We made it to the Continental in time and passed the "guest list" test and I bought the first round of \$6 Budweisers.

Another band was playing onstage and I spied Thieves drummer, Jamie Dawson floating through the small crowd. This was a CMJ showcase night for *Liquor and Poker Music*, and several of the bands had merchandise tables with CDs and t-shirts, including The Thieves. Then I saw Hal and Sam Stokes fussing about their table. Before I could walk over and introduce myself, the other band finished their set and the boys scurried off to the basement to get their equipment.

I had loaned Orcutt my Thieves CD a week earlier, so he was familiar with the music – but Webb had never heard them, so I was curious to hear his reaction. As the band set up, Webb points to Hal Stokes' guitar and says, "you don't bring a Gibson SG to play pop music – these guys are here to rock!"

The music of the White Stripes was blaring over the sound system, as Hal continued to set up his stuff. I walked up to the stage and he sees me coming and gives me a huge grin. I stick out my hand and he grabs it and shouts, "Hey Mate! How are ya!"

I shout back, "Hal! Good to meet ya." Then add, in case there's any doubt, "Michael Walls from 2 Walls Webzine!"

His expression changed to one of sudden recognition and he gives me an even bigger grin, "Hey! Glad you made it!" Apparently, there was doubt and he's just a super friendly guy to everyone.

"We'll talk later! Have a good show!" I shout and grab some front stage real estate with Webb and Orcutt.



The best description I've read about The Thieves' live shows was from the *LA Times* calling it "a blur of shaggy blonde hair and flailing guitars" – which is exactly what this is all about.

The music is loud and furious. The energy is through the roof. The shaggy blonde hair is flying (along with a good amount of sweat and spit), and the guitars are definitely flailing. They play everything from *Tales From the White Line*, but with a more live flare, extending some jams and throwing in some extra solos. I barely miss the Hammond organ from the studio versions. Hal loves to talk to the crowd – and it almost feels like everyone in the room is his best friend.

These guys love to play. Sure, most bands love to play. But these guys aren't putting on a show of it. I imagine this is the way they play at rehearsal. The way Angus Young probably rehearses.

They end the show with a bang – with their title track, "Tales from the White Line" – as well as a crash as Hal falls off of Jamie's drum kit in a crash of cymbals. It looks painful, but Hal says he's alright, and I've seen pictures from other shows where he's done the same thing, so I'm sure it's a bit choreographed. But still – it's got to be physically draining to put on a show like this.

The band rapidly clears their gear, anxious to bask in the afterglow of a successful show with the crowd. As they mingle through, it's hard to tell if these lads from Oxford, England – by way of Los Angeles, California – have friends and fans at The Continental tonight, or if they are just so damn easy going and friendly that they can chat and laugh with almost anyone.

Hal makes his way over to us, throws an arm around my shoulders and proceeds to thank me profusely for all the press 2Walls.com has been giving them. He then proceeds to tell me how much fun they had up in Rochester, hanging out with 2 Walls writer Craig Curtice at The Bug Jar and The House of Guitars, and the delicious muffins Curtice's wife made for breakfast the following day.

We talk a bit about their label, *Liquor and Poker Music*, and the impending public release of their album. They've been on the road a long time, traveling by RV to all corners of the country, bumming hot showers and breakfasts off friends, fans or strangers where ever they go. So Hal's hoping it all pays off as their album, *Tales From The White Line*, gets released nationally with promises of radio play.

I speak with Sam and Jamie and get other tales from the "White Line" tour, including the breakdown of their RV somewhere between Texas and New York and the two days crammed in a rented minivan full of equipment. Tomorrow they head off to Chapel Hill, NC in that same minivan. I also get another recap of their Rochester shows and those delicious muffins at Curtice's house.

But while they're touring under the umbrella of a record label and have the support of a PR firm, nothing is guaranteed and nothing is certain. They best they can hope for is that their hard work and good music gets recognized by the masses and they get rewarded with more than just hot showers and delicious muffins.

(Michael Walls is a staff writer for 2 Walls Webzine.)



Photo by James Bogue