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Primavera Sound 2007: the DiS Review

Artists: **Smashing Pumpkins, Sonic Youth, The Fall, Slint, Ted Leo & The Pharmacists, Portastatic, Blonde Redhead, Múm, Modest Mouse, The White Stripes, Patti Smith, Billy Bragg, Luke Slater, Wilco, Isis, The Apples In Stereo, The Rakes, The Melvins, Jonathan Richman, Black Mountain, Pelican, Maximo Park, Comets On Fire, Architecture In Helsinki, Battles, Alexander Tucker, Black Lips, Beirut, The Good The Bad & The Queen, Brightblack Morning Light, Justice, Parenthetical Girls, Chromeo, Girl Talk**

Don't want to read everything below? Fair enough. In short, **Primavera Sound '07** featured sun, sea, and almost no sand at all. There was some grass, and concrete, and a number of stages. Bands and DJs performed on them, and DiS danced. Yes, yes we did. And we didn't get sunburned.

Should you wish to follow us back in time – only a week or so, don't be scared – then hold our hands tight. Barcelona was dry and dusty; the festival site littered with plastic beer cups and the slight smell of decay from the various hot dawg stalls dotted around the place. Sticking to pizza and baguettes proved beneficial to DiS's alcohol-swimming innards – the beer was, brilliantly and unexpectedly, free, so we perhaps needlessly consumed An Official Lot Of It. *Eeek*, but great. We saw stars on the Thursday, and not just because we were blinded by Justice.

Despite the location – the city's seaside Forum – ultimately serving more as a post-modernist concrete wasteland than a festival site, Primavera Sound proved to be a fine affair. DiS stopped out until the wee hours of the mid morning, floated from stage to stage, saw bands old and new, and drank like it was fresher's week. The only downer: an occasionally chilly wind coming off the Mediterranean. Then again, that merely served to remind us of where we were. Sometimes it's not bad, this rock writing lark.

All words by Mike Diver, Kev Kharas and Shain Shapiro

The first day of the main Primavera line-up, Thursday June 31, sees grunge legends rub shoulders with electro-twee ladyboys and sample-heavy party bangers. **The Melvins** are the first act DiS allows to properly hold our collective attention: large of hair and mighty of riff, the veteran outfit thunder through *Houdini* (their's was one of a handful of *Don't Look Back*-themed sets)... until the power shorts out and the main Estrella Damm stage is deafened by silence. The band don't change – laughs are had amongst fans old and new as an albeit predictable set has its thread snapped by failing electricity. Even from a distance the band prove disorientating, with volume levels (while they last) bordering on the intolerable. Sat on a hill of gravel and thistle that slopes back from the stage into the Med, the band's relentless crunch is disseminated into waves and they eventually, via fair means or foul, lose their grip on DiS's ears.

Over the way a little, **Alexander Tucker** is setting his drones in motion at the ATP stage. There's people up front next to us with their eyes shut, swaying in the sea breeze. Maybe it's so they don't have to look at Tucker, who needs a wash. His music is just as messy, but works something meticulous through hazy loops and back-fed vocals that slur your vision. Applause for the mastery, but before too long DiS gets seasick and longs for some solid ground.



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Comets On Fire hammer their way through a *Don't Look Back* set, taking their *Blue Cathedral* LP through the abattoir blues and spraying its sliced remains all over the ATP stage's densely-packed crowd. *But*, although it's the quintet's last-ever show – mourn their passing we most certainly do – there's a mighty clash brewing: halfway through *Blue Cathedral*, around about the mighty riff intro of *'The Antlers Of The Midnight Sun'*, **Smashing Pumpkins** are on the main stage. DiS splits and runs like hell.

Arriving just in time for *'Today'*. Fucking *genius*. Billy Corgan's gaggle of faces recognizable and absolutely not provide the first coherent wander down memory lane. DiS is surrounded by the dewy eyes of media bandits who the 'Pumpkins meant more to in bedrooms past, but we can't fail to be gripped a little bit by songs like *'Disarm'* and *'Stand Inside Your Love'*. Sure, Billy does look like a bit of a wanker up there, all decked out in white like some balding angel, but when the violins cut in for *'Tonight, Tonight'* we have to cross our arms to avoid getting carried away. Slightly more trivially, the band's new bassist is *hot*. Bravo, Billy.



On the relatively small CD Drome by Vueling stage, **Parentetical Girls** split DiS's opinion rather: on one hand, the Zac Pennington-fronted outfit pause between songs, allowing those in attendance to hear Slint from across the site, but on the other they often fail to develop their meandering lo-fi melodies. Pennington has a voice with a rare timbre, and they cover Casiotone For The Painfully Alone's *'Love Connection'* quite beautifully, but they tease and waste the crowd with songs that largely go nowhere.

Slint entertain the Rockdelux by Friday's Project stage's audience – between **Dirty Three**'s run-through of *Ocean Songs* (best moment: Warren Ellis' *"What festival is this? Thank you, Roskilde!"*) and **The White Stripes** – remarkably well for a band essentially peddling the same old *same old*. That they're doing *Spiderland* doesn't wash with us – it is, really, the only worthwhile material they have, and it's *well* old. Still, floating in and out of the performance takes DiS back to the early '90s with a dull thud, and there is a sense of 'I was there' satisfaction come the show's climax. The White Stripes benefit from their unusual surroundings – the sight of the Med behind the stage lifts a selection of relative classics up a few notches, rendering the pair's set an enjoyable, if wholly unspectacular, watch. There's the usual threat of explosion as Jack tries to marry Mister Rock Star with Master White, but this time he can't fuse the chaos into the candy canes and the show never quite goes nuclear. That's what you get if you don't play *'Screwdriver'*, we guess.

For some reason we're late for **Justice** – we don't remember why, but it almost certainly has something to do with the fairly late Thursday realization that beer is free in the guest area (high fives). We're brought round by this half-set of broken beats and synths that swing like wrecking balls, challenging those amassed before the duo's neon cross to pick their tired feet back off the concrete floor again. And again. And again. The response is as unanimous as the dissent in our lactic ankles.



The Gallic pair are followed, almost immediately, by **Girl Talk**, who delivers what – in one DiSser's opinion – is the best set of the night. Rolling from the usual dance and trance to funk rock, blues, gospel and even bluegrass, the man behind the desks and lights and *stuff* demonstrates masterfully how seamless music can be to mix with a hint of imagination, but how complicated it is to pull it off well.

Day two of the hectic-as bill finds **Portastatic** opening proceedings on the Rockdeluxe stage. The new songs sound great, but the performance can only be summarized as mediocre. At just gone 6pm, barely anyone on site gives a damn about their presence – it's a shame, as in a crowded, sweaty club, they'd be

ace.

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The Auditori is Primavera's strangest venue – a bizarrely-angled purple wedge of glass and steel, it houses a selection of performances from the event's most dark-and-intimate acts, even if queuing to enter the place makes us feel as if we're on a school trip. It's here that **Billy Bragg** strides into the spotlight. He serenades the still-arriving crowd with *To Have and Have Not*, and proceeds through the political half of the set, trying to bend sentiments like 'no power without accountability' into campfire choruses. Yawn. But then come the love songs. These are much, much better. Problem is that the setting's so comfortable – it's worryingly easy to drift off into a half-slumber. Sun is required: invigoration and inebriation.

Over at Estrella Damm, **The Rakes** deliver a spirited set of atypical dance-rock. While they do sound like everyone else, or everyone else sounds like *them*, the quintet do a bang-up job of sounding like, well, how they sound. While there's nothing is wrong with that, it's odd that they precede a band fronted by one of alternative music's most-revered mavericks.

That'll be **The Fall**, then. Mark E. Smith + sunshine + the Mediterranean + a few glasses (cups) of free beer = something perversely entertaining. *But*, Black Lips are on!

But we're getting ahead of ourselves: on the ATP stage, a little earlier, **Brightblack Morning Light** are rubbish. Nothing more needs saying. **How Dare You!**'s widdly dissonance on the Vice stage, meanwhile, proves enough to drive us back towards the bar. Drawn by the citing of influences like Television Personalities and ESG, we're repelled as they skew those influences into a horrible, hypodermic mess. Yours, still flinching. **Black Mountain** bring their Blue Cheer to the ATP stage, and as one psychedelic jam follows another, good spirits run free. They're loud, sweaty and, most importantly, fun... and at just before 8pm.

Blonde Redhead, meanwhile, draw DiS right to the front of the assembled throng, and not just because we want a better look at Kazu Makino's hot pants (although we're not saying that's *not* part of the thinking as we push through an ocean of shoulders and elbows). Theirs is a sound that stultifies with duvet guitars and floats in sheets, so the accompanying off-the-sea wind just adds a bit of ebb and flow. They're remote and the Barcelona sun can't thaw that, so *23* remains trapped within its iceberg. But still: hot pants.

But... but... but... **Black Lips**. The Atlanta-spawned retro-jangle-rockers – flower punks, if you must – are immediately a festival highlight. Are they drunk? We can't tell, but they're having a hell of a time, and we can't help but be swayed to their way of thinking. And dancing. DiS is jerking shoulders, tapping feet. A passing sailboat collapses in the background. Sun sets, light changes. Clouds go pink. Guitarist hawks a loogy in the air. Dodges it. Catches it. Two beers cost 20 euros.

We don't care. They play a load of songs, three of them are memorable. We don't care. They don't care. They slur incoherent and play like drunk five-year-olds in mud. We don't care. They don't care. Life is good. Thumbs up and back-slaps.

Beirut's otherworldly rhythms drift across the festival site during a moment of stillness, stirring DiS from our temporary lethargy. The size of the stage – Zach Condon and band play the second-largest on site – rather overpowers their fragilities, but the performance is still little short of brilliance. Eight youngsters churning through mandolins, accordions, acoustic guitars, banjos and brass, conjuring up melodies somewhere between Serbia and Boston. Regardless of the sound quality on the night – tonight – Beirut remain one of the most inventive indie bands on the surface of the known musical world.



Following The Fall on the main stage are the surprisingly fantastic **Maximo Park**. While their mix of angles and melodies is comparable at a base level to on-earlier sorts The Rakes, there's a wit and intelligence within these Geordies that makes those with no expectations whatsoever sit up and take notice. Those paying only casual attention, wanting aural wallpaper to liven up another few drinks, are hooked for the entire set. Fantastic, then, in short.

Midnight finds **Modest Mouse** squinting under the blinding lights of the ATP stage – the comparatively small standing-room-only space before them is, in a nutshell, *fucking rammed*. It's maybe meant to hold, say, 2,000 people – it feels like there's more than double that watching Isaac Brock and company. Their set is angst-ridden and perfectly sarcastic, mixing the brand new with the classical old. An obviously pished Brock botches *The View*, but it's still a highlight alongside recent single *Dashboard*. Despite the



claustrophobia, DiS leaves the show contented

The **Chromeo** duo get booties shaking over at the Vice stage: with their name hanging in neon pink and their stage submerged beneath acrid dry ice, we feel like we've somehow returned to '80s LA and one of those films where a suspended cop gets tough with greasy local hoodlums as he fights to clear his name. Chromeo are most definitely bad cop. Or perhaps just naughty cop? *"That's it, Chromeo: three weeks with pay!"*

While Chromeo keep the fun rhymes flowing, the minimalist tact of **Luke Slater's** a whole different proposition. His beats hit *hard* around the 3am mark. Hard like the throbbing pulse in your temple when toothache renders the left side of your head pointless. The repetitive use of space in Slater's techno calls for the crowd to fill it with their own imagination; DiS chooses to fill it with chants of *"Mugabe! Mugabe!"* and *"They-don Bois! They-don Bois!"* The crowd grows hostile. **DJ Yoda** mashes some beats and splices some riddims, but the powers that be decide to fence off DiS's path, so we return to the free booze to listen from afar. **Bonde Do Role** play and barely anyone in the DiS camp bats an eyelid. 'Cause they're kinda closing a little earlier than we'd hoped. **Kid Koala** guides us home to our hotel, the scorpion bridge now a friendly roadside assurance that we are, indeed, going the right way.

Saturday... news creeps over the mobile internet telecommunication freeway *whatever* that England's footballers managed a decent draw with Brazil. Good times. DiS celebrates by walking into the centre of Barcelona, against the advice of the at-hotel Primavera representative. Fifty minutes later we're knackered. Pizza on Las Ramblas doesn't refresh us any, and finding a cab proves a total nightmare. *Fuck this sun*, seriously – DiS is pasty for a reason. We lurk in the shadows. These Spaniards are mental.

Ted Leo opens the main action with his **Pharmacists** in tow. Looking older than he sounds – he must be touching middle age by now – Leo grinds out adolescent punkish rock by the barrelful. Sure, one song sounds pretty much like the next, but it's ferocious fun all the same – *'Me and Mia'* is the true standout. DiS skedaddles just before Leo ends, though, to catch **The Apples In Stereo** on the ATP stage. There's a silvery cape up there, but beyond the visual attraction their indie-pop falls flat today. The usually sharp melodies sound muddled, and there's a depression where elevation should emerge.



The same can't be said of **Architecture In Helsinki**, who are boisterously buoyant of mood. The crowd follows their every twist and turn, their every awkward sidestep and wayward rhythm. Theirs is a brand of alt-pop all wrapped up in a tight little bow, dripping with droplets of boy-girl sing-song and sticky, rhythmic slurry. Does that even make sense? It's ADD-driven candy-wrapper rock and roll from Australians far from home but entirely *at home*; their music might be schizophrenic, but it doesn't take a genius to follow it with a beaming grin.

The Long Blondes sport nice dresses beneath banners for Spanish booze of choice, Estrella Damm, but their Yorkshire born and bred indie-pop fails to inspire the small crowd before them. They're out of their depth on the festival's biggest stage, despite packing their strongest tunes beside their finest evening wear. **Patti Smith**, predictably, is a considerably bigger draw. She doesn't play *'Land'*. She does play *'Smells Like*

Teen Spirit'. To call this a 'mistake' is like calling a bout of cunge-tongue with Patti and Courtney a 'mistake': a huge, huge understatement. Her set leaves a bad taste in the mouth, etc...

Pelican are a welcome distraction, their muscular instrumental metal-tinged epics fleshed out beyond their tighty whiteys and inciting what can only be described as fist-pumping appreciation. They're dark and loud, and as the sun dithers on the horizon, they send it packing with riffs so huge they almost certainly sent shockwaves through most of western Europe. That they're followed immediately by **Isis** makes for something of a wet dream for one DiSser on site. The California-based masters of atmospheric post-metal go about their business brilliantly, ripping humungous holes in their *...Absence Of Truth* material. Even from the safety of the bleachers to the stage's side, it's a quaking experience. As they climax – suitably voluminous and full of bombast – something special's afoot on the main stage.

Sonic Youth's *Don't Look Back* set, for their *Daydream Nation* LP, is easily the most anticipated of those going down at Primavera. DiS is as front and centre as the guest area allows as the familiar melodies come flooding. We know we shouldn't like this – it does smack of boosting the coffers above anything else – but we do. Ultimately, whatever the motives behind SY's decision to tour *Daydream Nation*, there is no doubt that the potential results can be spectacular. We witness this from what we've elected to call 'the island', but the sound still washes over like warm rain. We kick our heels to every beat.

Despite a couple of sarcastic remarks from Thurston - "Everyone ready? Have you got your notes?" - it's hard to detect any more regret than is standard for a Sonic Youth show. Whether they can hold the cynicism off for a whole tour remains to be seen, but tonight they're magical.

A little earlier, **The Good the Bad and the Queen's** set is blighted by inexplicably low levels on the Rockdelux stage. It's really, *really* frustrating - they are pushed back by the techno blast coming from the stacks opposite and the songs are robbed of a lot of their potency as the vocals drown in a sound that is more shallow water than deep green Thames. All it would've taken is someone backstage to turn the master volume up a couple of notches. It's a shame. Even earlier, **The Duritti Column** tackle the ATP crowd: as good as they are, they owe a considerable debt to the setting. The Vini Reilly-led three-, and then four-piece, warble through a set that sees shoegaze guitars flicker in faded primary colours and shine in the sunlight effortless and without direction. At times it's lost; at times it's gorgeous.

DiS pays its second visit to the Auditori for **Jonathan Richman**. He is charming, and we don't use that word lightly. Such a dumb face and such goofy dance moves would usually get DiS clenching fists, but with Richman it's different: you can't help but warm to a New Yorker who has rewritten all his songs in Spanish especially for the show and makes sure that they still rhyme. The Auditori begins and ends on its feet for Richman.

Post-Sonic Youth, the main stage experiences something of a comedown - not that we mean that in a negative sense, as **Wilco** deliver one of the festival's finest sets. Every word Jeff Tweedy spews proves hypnotic, regardless of whether the band is debuting songs from the recent *Sky Blue Sky* or diving into their back catalogue. At well past 2am, the set seems to go on forever - with a full moon high in the sky and a crashing sea somewhere behind DiS in the darkness, things couldn't be more perfect. Or could they?

Not just yet: **Múm** provide a small distraction, granted, but our toes are twitching for something a little more... *dance*. Klaxons are meant to close the Rockdeluxe stage; they, though, are elsewhere, leaving some unusual suspects to end Primavera.

By half past three in the morning, DiS is positively dribbling for **Battles**. They don't disappoint, but exactly how our actions - our moves and smiles and waving hands and high-fives and chirps and whistles - can be accurately transformed into words, *we don't know*. How's this: "Battles... :/ :o :>."

It's what our faces look like the next morning, at least. *Perfect ...ly* knackered.

All photos by **Rachel Cawley** - from top: *Black Mountain, Comets On Fire, The White Stripes, Blonde Redhead, Beirut, The Long Blondes*