

## **Dirty Three: Showdown in Shanghai**

**Trio's performance incites riot; "The audience was going crazy." -- Warren Ellis**

Dirty Three's previously reported tour of Asia is over now, but it was an eventful one for the instrumental chamber rock trio. As originally reported in Shanghaiist.com, the band's very first date-- at Shanghai's Yun Feng Theatre on October 26-- erupted into chaos. Before they even got to China, the country's government "decided to cancel our performance permit because they thought we were a pornographic act due to our name. They asked that we change it to Dirt Three," wrote violinist Warren Ellis to Pitchfork in a detailed e-mail account of the event.

With the help of Australian trade organization Austrade and tour manager James Chen, the band were able to "seal the green light three days before the show, on the grounds that we were an important Australian cultural act and that we had no lyrics, so we couldn't be corruptive." So far so good, but here's where things get crazy. Yun Feng Theatre, which is owned by the People's Liberation Army, "decided to move the show forward an hour" in order to accommodate an acrobatic performance "for local dignities and officials. James was told to take the offer or cancel the show," Ellis continued.

"The government has been closing down lots of venues and making it difficult for bands to play, and this decision to change the show was seen by the audience as another attempt by the government to curb their self-expression." About that audience: many of them were students, and there were about 600 of them in attendance. So when-- as a result of all this bureaucracy and confusion-- "the theatre decided to light the house at 8 o'clock instead of 8:30 [and] then close the curtains, the audience stormed the stage.

"It was in the middle of 'Sue's Last Ride'. I had my back to the crowd. When I turned, I noticed some people climbing the curtains trying to pull them open. The audience was going crazy. Probably one of the most exciting moments I have ever had onstage. You could hear them screaming over the music, and we were playing very loud. In the wings, the acrobats were dancing and watching. Then a guy ran and jumped on me.

"By this stage, I had no idea what was happening, but our tour manager was white and shaking, holding people and the curtains back, assisted by others. There were people everywhere: crowd, security, and acrobats. It was fantastic. When we stopped, the place exploded, and James [Chen] grabbed me and said, 'Get the fuck out. The police are coming, and you may be arrested.' I asked why, and he said he couldn't explain. We packed and were shielded into a waiting van. The audience was chanting 'Dirty Three,' and the theatre staff shook our hands. Confusing? You bet.

"We were back in the hotel for half an hour, and my friend, guitar maker James Trussart, was at the show [and] called me and said all hell had broken loose, the people wouldn't leave and were throwing things at the officials and that it was announced we would do another show. Jim [White, drummer] walked back to the venue to see what was happening. He spoke to some people but didn't come back with any clearer picture. "We played a second show that night in another venue. James Chen spent the whole night refunding people's money. I didn't know the price of the tickets. We do get involved in that sort of detail but really had no idea what was the norm in China, and you hope that your people represent you well. Dirty Three were not being paid for the tour, only costs and a token fee. [Chen] returned all the money he had. Then the theatre director felt sorry and gave him some to refund. Then a policeman gave him some from his pocket. I think they just wanted everyone to leave. He refunded 300 people and expected to refund the other 300 people over the following days."

Fortunately for the band, said Ellis, "the rest of the dates were fine, maybe a little less exciting. We had a fantastic time and thank the people of China and Taiwan. A lot of these places don't have the infrastructure or the experience dealing with this sort of thing, and it's really part of the attraction of touring there: you never know what is going to happen." We're still trying to wrap our heads around this ridiculous situation (an austere, instrumental rock trio inciting a riot?!), but it is pretty great that the theatre staff shook the band's hands on their way out. There is at least one thing of which we're fairly certain: no one in the audience noticed that "in the excitement, we missed that last change in 'Sue's Last Ride'."