

# Review: Sebadoh, Adam Harding & Friends, Corner Hotel, Sep 19

[Gigs & Festivals](#) | POSTED BY [TIM EG](#), 20 SEP 2011



First, the less said about Melbourne filmmaker/muso Adam Harding and his titular band the better. It was mindless sludge writ loud ... like grunge without the songs. Unfortunately, the lone support act's '90s-fixated plod foreshadowed the more cumbersome moments of American indie rock icons Sebadoh, whose headlining set stumbled again and again into a banter-heavy comedy of errors.

But any Sebadoh fan – “any *true* Sebadoh fan,” as founding member Lou Barlow observed during the difficulties – knows the band has always been on the brink of falling apart at the seams. That’s half the charm, really. And so if anyone can take repeated strokes of rotten luck and turn it into a goofy badge of honour, it’s Sebadoh. Thus Barlow and fellow bass-and-guitar-swapping singer-songwriter Jason Loewenstein made the most of a chaotic Monday night, despite playing to a half-full room after the previous night’s sold-out gig in the same space.

What was the bad luck, exactly? Well, there was a lost guitar pick early on and later a misplaced capo. But most glaring was a broken snare that took about 10 minutes to replace. Couple all that with lots of shaggy banter, altered drum and guitar parts for certain songs (thanks to new drummer Bob D’Amico as well as Loewenstein’s sudden chops), the requisite switching between bass and guitar every so often, some long pauses for tuning and the

inherent shambling quality of Sebadoh in general. Quite a dissolute set, then. Of course, the guys were only too happy to make light of it all, and the crowd played along gamely enough.

Despite two hours trying to catch up to the set list amid so many breaks in momentum, the band's beloved songs poured freely forth. Barlow began the night with a string of his best-known Sebadoh tunes – 'Too Pure', 'On Fire', 'Ocean', 'Skull', 'Rebound', 'Magnet's Coil' – punctuated by the super-brief 'Puffin' on a Pot Pipe' from his old solo project Sentridoh. If those felt somewhat rushed and blunted delivered back to back so early in the night, Loewenstein fared better with his darker, grungier work, from 'Shit Soup' to 'Got It' to 'Mind Reader'. D'Amico's newfound snare enabled drums to return halfway through 'Not Too Amused', and 'Love to Fight' got revisited at the speed of hardcore.

Whereas Loewenstein's songs are all menace and lurch, Barlow's are more melodic and ringing by comparison. (Though his voice is far less clean live than on record.) The band continued to lean hard on 1994's freshly reissued classic *Bakesale*, with Barlow doing 'Dreams' and album opener 'License to Confuse'. But it was an older song – the J. Mascis-directed venom of 'The Freed Pig', from 1991's *III* – that was the highlight of Barlow's songs for me. Loewenstein soon matched that summit with his own 'Sister' from 1993's head-fuck *Bubble & Scrape*, albeit still playing bass to Barlow's guitar. Back on guitar, Loewenstein then dipped into *Bakesale* again: 'Dramamine' was made thrash-y and almost unrecognisable, and 'Careful' so intense that Barlow's eyeglasses tumbled off.

Barlow's next wave brought '2 Years 2 Days' and 'Soul and Fire' from *Bubble & Scrape* and the noticeably improved 'Beauty of the Ride' from 1996's *Harmacy*. He admitted writing 'Give Up' – with its line "Helpless slob in his dead-end day job" – back when he was shackled to just such a job. He later broke into an odd tirade against the Americana genre, but it was hard to take him too seriously. Then he excavated the early 'New Worship' and closed the hobbled and winding set with arguably the most quintessential of all his anthems, 'Brand New Love', which like 'The Freed Pig' was jammed out at the end with satisfying results.

Still happy to banter come encore time, Barlow and Loewenstein joked about Australiana in light of Barlow's Americana outburst, and Barlow bragged about drinking a whole bottle of wine earlier before giving a lengthy backstory on the encore's sole entry. It turns out 'Willing to Wait' was once rumoured to be in consideration for the break-up song for Ross and Rachel on *Friends*, and so it yielded a huge-budget video that failed to prod the single into the mainstream.

Ever the grumpy Eeyore of indie rock, Barlow called it his least favourite Sebadoh song and rendered it considerably heavier. Then, resigned and spent, the band left the stage and the remaining punters began to disperse. So finished a long, strange gig that would have been an out-and-out disaster for any other band. But for Sebadoh, it was a chance to crack wise and play it looser than ever.

**Words:** Doug Wallen

---

Source URL: <http://everguide.com.au/music/gigs-and-festivals/news/review-sebadoh,-adam-harding-friends,-corner,-sep-19.aspx>