

# Rock of stages

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## Slade high in loudness category

If the measure of greatness in rock music is the number of windows a group can smash in one performance, Kiss is ahead of the British band Slade, and Thundermug is out of the competition.

Feeling somewhat unqualified to judge the merits of Slade at Friday's concert in London Arena, I eavesdropped on the critical acclaim of volume-rock veterans.

Throughout the onslaught of Slade, they applied all the tests.

Glasses were held at arm's length to check vibrations, feet were glued to the floor for shock impact and windows were watched for shatter splits.

One young fan volunteered the information that the U.S. group Kiss had blown six windows in a concert display. It wasn't an eyewitness account (he wasn't sure where or when), but it was enough to resolve the debate: Slade may be wonderfully loud, but not the loudest.

Still, no one seemed unhappy with second best. Slade was fortunate to be appearing before a quivering group of die-hard fans who

knew exactly what was coming and how to receive it. (I counted only three bodies tumbling into the night with hands clapped over raging ears.)

There is concert etiquette which must be observed.

Slade does not appear, it feels its way on-stage. As the arena blackens and lights begin strobing, only the novice wonders why fifteen minutes have passed without action.

There is the ritual lighting of the flames (matches or lighters held aloft), then a moment (or five) of silence to peak anticipation . . . and then Slade strikes.

With no discernable instrumental ability and vague whining vocals, the band manages to push the audience to its feet and into a pulsating frenzy. The secret, of course, is the sound which — to put it mildly — is deafening.

London's own Thundermug opened the concert before an audience of about 800, and found, not surprisingly, it has lost its fans.

An eight-year-old rock band, apparently in its final stages of evolution, Thundermug has rejected volume in favor of music and that is something few Slade fans seem willing or able to appreciate.

Under new management, Thundermug is developing into a fine rock group. The sound is still heavy but no longer overwhelmed with amplification.

With three albums on the Axe label, Thundermug impressed critics with solid talent and exciting material. Unfortunately, the trip from studio to stage was a bad one and the group failed to make any impression in concert tours.

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There have been changes.

The lead singer left the band eight months ago and has not been replaced. The result is a less driving vocal sound that sometimes gets lost in the instrumentals. Thundermug has still to discover the perfect balance between vocals and instrumentals.

Fresh from the bar circuit, Thundermug is still smoothing the approach to a concert audience (introductions are sometimes amateurish and awkward). But, with theatrics cut to a minimum, the group is developing a sophisticated stage presence.

There is visual excitement as the group concentrates on music and making it a mutually enjoyable experience for performer and audience.