

SILVERCHAIR: Freak Show

(Murmur/Epic)

Rating: ****

By Sandy Masuo

The difference between rehashing and reviving music forms is how much fresh personality goes into it. Sure, you could play name-that-tune and spot-the-homage with Silverchair's sophomore effort just as easily as their debut, but now as then they pay tribute to their hard rocking forbears with a sassy, inventive panache that is entirely theirs.

Freak Show features lots of the bristling riffage and heavy, intoxicating grooves ("Slave," "Learn To Hate," "The Closing") that fueled 1995's *Frogstomp*, but singer/guitarist Daniel Johns, bassist Chris Joannou and drummer Ben Gillie temper it with some surprising new elements. A smattering of mellow interludes incorporate bits of psychedelia and doses of epic pop a la Smashing Pumpkins. "Cemetery" explores the unlikely but pleasantly heady cusp between the Pumpkins' "Disarm" and the exotic bluster of Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir." In "Petrol And Chlorine" the trio let the twangy sitar and Indian percussion take over as they whip up a small squall of scruffy post-punk psychedelia. In addition to the new musical ingredients, the sly tongue-in-cheek-iness that makes Silverchair such a captivating live act is beginning to creep into the songs. "I live in a cemetery," Johns sings at one point, "I need a change--not to imitate, to irritate." The rustic melodicism of "Pop Song For Us" sounds like a page mischievously cribbed from the R.E.M. songbook--though they can't resist the urge to let big chunky metallic guitar shards bite into the tune now and again.

In this painfully self-conscious world of post-modern rock, genuine emotion frequently takes a back seat to clever conceits. Thankfully, Silverchair know better.