

The Mosquitos: Ready for bigger stings

THE MOSQUITOS. One of the New York area's best young rock bands. Also: The Smithereens. Thursday night at the Lone Star Cafe in Manhattan.

By Wayne Robins

If I were an A&R executive for a record company, I'd sign the Mosquitos my first week on the job. So far, their recorded output consists of a five-song mini-album, "That Was Then, This is Now" on the tiny, independently-distributed Valhalla label, and one song, "Darn Well," on the cassette-only sampler "Garage Sale" on the ROIR tape label.

The Mosquitos' set at the Lone Star Thursday night showed that the band, which formed in the Huntington area nearly four years ago, is clearly ready for bigger things. The band was originally affiliated with the psychedelic pop revival of a few years ago, but the Mosquitos have wisely refused to be typecast as a genre cult act. They've refined their presentation and widened their stylistic horizons without sacrificing a bracing, energetic edge.

The key man is Vance Brescia: lead singer, songwriter and guitarist. As a performer, Brescia is compelling but unpretentious. He wastes no energy on pose or persona: What you see is what you get.

His "I Know a Secret," which sounds like it was inadvertently left off "Bea-



David Allen

The not-as-yet-much-recorded Mosquitos, originally of Huntington

ties '65," seems like a naive teenage romantic trifle until Brescia raises the stakes with a throwaway phrase. In the middle of a line, he sneaks in the phrase "a filthy secret, darling," and suddenly the performance takes on a dangerous charge.

Brescia the songwriter brings vitality to classic rock forms. "That Was Then, This is Now" is his finest song,

with fresh images, an architectural sense of structure, and the kind of hook that was made to blast from car radios.

In executing Brescia's vision, the other Mosquitos play with intensity that supplements rather than overpowers the melodic strength of the songs. Tony Millions plays keyboards inspired by, though not limited to, the

Vox and Farfisa organ style of 1960s psychedelic rock. Iain Morrison and Mitch Towse on bass and drums provide a taut yet flexible rhythmic bottom, while Steven Prisco joins Brescia on the guitar front line.

The result is a sound that finds new twists on old roots, not unlike Elvis Costello's group, the Attractions. And speaking of roots, the Mosquitos peppered their set with oldies that revealed a healthy perspective: Any band that can effortlessly entwine the 1960s rock classic "Shakin' All Over," Ray Charles' "Unchain My Heart" and George Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So" with its own fresh material is really onto something.

The Smithereens were a fine choice to share the bill with the Mosquitos. They're similarly song-oriented, hard-edged, and unpretentious. If the Mosquitos seem to be a contemporary blend of Beatles and Blues Magoos, Smithereens songs made sometimes simultaneous references to Eric Burdon and the Animals, the Byrds and the Clash.

Depending on which way you look at it, it's either folk-rock with a pile-driving edge or post-punk with an uncommon appreciation of melody. A detonating bass line was the Smithereens' musical trademark. And original songs with chord changes in the Elvis Costello/Squeeze mold made one anticipate with relish their forthcoming album on the Enigma label. /■