

Time Out

New York

Issue 151

August 13–20, 1998

Mike Keneally & Beer for Dolphins

Bottom Line; Friday, August 14

Onstage at the Knitting Factory last month, Mike Keneally flitted around a keyboard, his guitar falling off his sweaty body as he sang and emoted himself into a lather—all while performing feats on both instruments that most musicians couldn't imagine. Often hilarious and excessively tuneful, his band Beer for Dolphins twists rock into a high-minded pleasure. Ever since Frank Zappa checked out, Todd Rundgren all but packed it in and Victor Borge stopped working small rooms, there's no one out there like Keneally.

Certainly among the most accomplished guitarists to arrive in the last 15 years, Keneally has transcended his past as the featured multi-instrumentalist in Zappa's last group. He's emerged as a renegade songwriter and virtuoso who turns frothy pop and eccentric "unpop" into lush, irrepressible melodicism, and

he's created an unabashed masterpiece in his new disc, *Sluggo!*

This is the kind of music that should be played on the radio, though radio may not deserve hits of this caliber. "Frozen Beef" rocks relentlessly as it decimates rock clichés; "I'm Afraid" is pure adult-contemporary sheerly because it's heartfelt and well played; and "Tranquilado," a surreal symphony on which Keneally plays every instrument, may simply be *the* most joyously unclassifiable pop track of the decade.

Keneally's music is as explosive in concert as on record, and he and his great band weave comic moments into each performance. Audiences are gradually being integrated into improvisations on this highly unorthodox, freewheeling tour. BFD locates the fun and the unshakable musicality in every gaffe that can befall a group of savants living in a van and bashing out stuff this dense night after night. Neither a note nor a guffaw is wasted. This band, with such a peculiar genius leading it, is a thing to savor.—*Matt Resnicoff*