

FIRIN' ON ALL SIX!

LIT
Birmingham: Institute Library
17 May 2014

I arrived too late to watch the support band due to a long interview with Lit which is always disappointing and yet if interviewee Jeremy Popoff wasn't actually the guitarist of the main act, then I may well have missed them too.

Lit has never toured these shores properly, save for festival appearances or the odd one off warm up gig, circumstances simply haven't allowed it, the dreaded big C tragically claiming the life of drummer Allen Schellenberger and before that the obvious problems associated with losing a major label deal. Lit made their mark with the classic 'A Place In The Sun' album in 1999 and a fifteen year anniversary seems like the perfect excuse to do a tour.

This was as good a concert as I have seen and with six hundred people packed into the cosy Institute Library, the atmosphere was one of the most exciting that I have ever witnessed at any venue. The band played the whole of "that" album from 'Four' right the way through to the title track, with obvious highlights in between being 'Ziplock' and 'My Own Worst Enemy', actually to be honest I really can't pick.

With the most senior mosh pit ever witnessed in the U.K., the band then proceeded to blast out a further nine songs with the verve and the energy usually the preserve of bands far younger. 'You Tonight', 'The Broken' and the teary eyed 'Happy In The Meantime' (dedicated to Schellenberger) came and went, beer got thrown around, people fell over and you know what? Nobody cared and nobody wanted to leave the best party in Birmingham that weekend.

Come back soon Lit, Birmingham needs another party.

Mike Newdeck

**RED DRAGON CARTEL/SYRON VANES/
JUPITER FALLS**
London: Islington 02 Academy
06 June 2014

I must admit I felt incredibly sorry for the young Leeds band Jupiter Falls having to come on stage to barely a hundred punters in the venue. With a capacity of eight hundred, it felt like your mates turning up on stage at a Pub Rock gig to find half the punters setting off for home after getting a call from their irate wife that their dinner was about to be fed to the dog.

With the same booking agent that Red Dragon Cartel employ, it was not entirely unexpected to see this new Classic Hard Rock band with a 21st Century attitude on the support slot, and with a debut album 'Revolution' produced by the renowned Roy Z about to hit the shops, the modern styling's of 'Awake' and 'Bitter' mixed with the classic old-school sound of charity single 'Someday' and 'Chasing The Dragon'. All were aired to a lukewarm reception that showed a lot of promise amongst the youthful energy and spunk on stage.

I remember the 'Bringer Of Evil' album that came out back in 1984 and even recall the adverts in Kerrang! at the time. They were touted as Sweden's answer to the NWOBHM bands that were pushing Punk music back into the underground scene and were as traditional to Heavy Metal as ale and chips were to a Yorkshire-man. Vocalist/guitarist Rimbart Vahlstroem and guitarist Anders Hahne, after more than thirty years ploughing the Syron Vanes cause, looked as comfortable onstage as your favourite sofa is to sit in with drummer Mats Bergentz and Anders Sellborn filling in for Jakob Lagergren on bass. Their six songs on offer tonight were all culled from their latest offering 'Evil Redux' and the fast ripping 'Hellion Child' had some in the audience head-banging away. The mid-paced sing-along chorus of 'King Of It All' and the fast-tempo riffing of 'Only Hell Remains' saw SV hitting their stride with Vahlstroem and Bergentz sporting 'Lucifer' and 'Skull' t-shirts which left no doubt as to how 'Metal' this band were. The grinding

burner 'End Of The World'. For me, it was quite the nostalgia trip to see a band some thirty years after being wide-eyed and dreamily leafing through my copy of Kerrang! at school.

And so to the return of the prodigal son... or Jake E Lee as he is otherwise known as, and with a grin and his custom Charvel strapped and ready, it was like 1986 all over again as that familiar wail launched into 'The Ultimate Sin'. Harem Scarem drummer and sometime Helix guitarist Oarren James Smith is no Ozzy Osbourne or Ray Gillen, but he utilises his love of The Clash and throws in The Sex Pistols, The Ramones and dare I say it, Jellyfish to give a balls-out raspy injection of earthy melodic growling Rock 'n' Roll singing that actually suits the new Lee/Ronnie Mancuso music. Smith was as exuberant as he was menacing on stage prowling the boards and gave a convincing performance. It was hard to take your eyes off of him sometimes as he proved the old adage that inside every drummer is a born front-man. Beggars & Thieves bassist Mancuso, almost a stickler at times for Carlos Santana, was a grinning cool cat to Smith's right and Canadian Jonas Fairley from Black Betty pounded the skins and looked every bit like he belongs in such exalted company.

'Deceived' had Smith mimicking the accented tones of Osbourne as Lee re-introduced the guitar pattern and chord progression of 'Bark At The Moon'. 'War Machine' showed how much Sabbath-influence Lee picked up from Osbourne and Smith was able to tailor his voice to the Blues-drenched Gillen songs with 'High Wire' and 'Rumblin' Train' from Badlands' debut, 'Shine On' and 'In A Dream' from 'Voodoo Highway' with 'Sun Red Sun' representing third album 'Dusk'. Mancuso was contented to play the straight man to Smith's grinning ball of energy whilst Lee was radiant as he pulled off runs and solos spinning and throwing shapes so reminiscent of the old Osbourne videos we used to watch on MTV. The Zeppelin inspired chant-fest 'Shout It Out' and 'Feeder' made up the quartet of songs from Red Dragon Cartel's debut album and no surprise to hear '...Moon' - Lee's signature tune to most fans - rounding off the night's entertainment. The fans, who managed to fill two thirds of the venue in the end, were just happy to see Lee back doing what he was renowned for all those years ago even if the audience seemed a little hesitant to get fully involved.

Carl Buxton

DAN REED NETWORK
London: 02 Academy Islington
10 June 2014

This evening represented a very special treat for fans of the short-lived Dan Reed Network as it epitomised their first live performance in London for over two decades (although they made their return in U.K. soil last year at the Enchanted Festival). The quintet, who released their eponymous debut album back in 1987 and went on hiatus only six years later, has returned stronger than ever. With the multi-cultural, original line-up of guitarist Brion James, bassist Melvin Brannon, keyboardist Blake Sakamoto, drummer Dan Pred and vocalist Dan Reed, DRN have a spectacular onstage presence!

I had seen Reed performing solo on several occasions, presenting acoustic versions of DRN and his solo material, and every time he left a long lasting impression on me with his heartfelt and moving rhythms. However, now seen DRN for the first time live, they are a completely different beast. The mellow and calm Reed became a performing tiger on stage, with his band mates following his lead and throwing an eye catching array of body moves. As for the music, their full of energy and Groove Funk songs made these guys such a tight and professional outfit that it is hard to beat; all in all making this evening was, so far, one of the best gigs yours truly has attended in 2014.

Classics such as 'Under My Skin', 'Rainbow Child', 'Make It Easy' and 'Ritual' (performed twice due to a mistake by James, making of it a friendly joke)

requesting, and Reed also mentioned on stage that they will hopefully release a new album soon. Amen to that.

The mega Funky 'Tiger In A Dress' became the first encore before they closed the night with a beautiful A Cappella rendition of 'Long Way To Go' for which all band members came to the front of the stage. After singing along to this, everyone left happily with worn out voices.

Mónica Castedo-López

RICHIE SAMBORA
London: Islington 02
13 June 2014

Despite being a Richie Sambora fanatic for twenty years, I've only seen "The King Of Swing" headline once, in 2012. So it's safe to say I was as excited and expectant as I've ever been considering, for this my second show, I was actually stood in the photo pit.

The lights eventually dropped and out he came, all on his own, resplendent in a dark outfit and white jacket combined with a trademark hat. He proceeded to serenade the crowd with Leon Russell's 'A Song For You' without any instruments, his face contorted to the song's emotion and his hands gesturing as he stood alone in the spotlight. He was then joined by the rest of the band, which included "The Queen Of Shred" Orianthi (Michael Jackson, Alice Cooper), 'Every Road Leads Home To You' and 'Nowadays' flew past in a orgy of photographs before we were allowed to enjoy the rest of the set (which consisted of Sambora solo tracks, Bon Jovi songs and covers from other artists) from the side of the stage.



Photo: Dave Sehill

Highlights included the boisterous crowd and solo during 'Lay Your Hands On Me', the mesmerizing guitar exchanges during 'Voodoo Chile' (Jimi Hendrix), the bouncing 'Who Says You Can't Go Home' and the Orianthi/Sambora 'Storybook Love' (Willy DeVille/Mark Knopfler) duet. Between songs, there was lots of banter and background information from Sambora who kept the crowd enthralled throughout. The main set closed with a cracking version of 'I'll Be There For You' where the gathered masses sang the chorus over and over again; during an extended break, all the hands were up, the "whoos" were ringing out loud and it was quite something.

But even these instances were surpassed by others that simply sent my senses and emotions swirling. There was only one song, 'Stranger In This Town', from my all-time favourite album but it sounded fabulous, especially when the crowd gave it their all in the choruses. Sambora also gave an acoustic based, slower rendition (on his famous twin-necked guitar) of 'Living On A Prayer', which featured both he and Orianthi on vocals with plenty of crowd participation. 'Seven Years Gone' has become my second favourite Sambora track and following an emotional introduction about his dad, he gave it everything for this one; even now, I literally get goose bumps thinking about my night's highlight. Of course no Sambora show would be complete without the fabulous 'Wanted Dead Or Alive'; the audience were at their loudest and they sang every word with real gusto and it brought things to a rapturous conclusion.

Sambora was on top form tonight and had he played more from his debut, including 'One Light Burning', I would be proclaiming this my greatest gig ever. Despite this negative, tonight was still sensational all round and one of my most memorable ever. Whilst I admit I am biased, the crowd response tonight says more than I ever could. Friday 13th may

HEAVEN & EARTH
Newcastle: 02 Academy
28 June 2014

Guitarist Stuart Smith must possess an address book to envy, with the ability to call on the likes of Glenn Hughes, Howard Leese, Richie Sambora, Joe Lynn Turner and David Paich to work on his albums. This has resulted in music of a high quality but a little fragmented when listened to as a full album. Their latest record 'Dig', however, marks a change in approach with the inspired recruitment of Joe Retta as sole vocalist and this certainly paid dividends resulting in a more focussed, cohesive release drawing on the rich heritage of the likes of Deep Purple, Bad Company and prime time Rainbow.

With a touring line-up completed by Bad Company bassist Lynn Sorensen, drummer Jackie Barnes (son and absolute spitting image of Aussie screamer Jimmy) and Hammond organist Ty Bailie whose credentials spread from Counting Crows to Peter Frampton and Tool, this was a band of the highest pedigree.



Their towering epic 'Victorious', with Retta's Dio-esque vocals and Smith's eastern tinged fret-work with a worthy nod towards Led Zeppelin's 'Kashmir' and Rainbow's 'Stargazer', was the perfect way to open the show.

With a set list drawn primarily from 'Dig', Heaven & Earth were pure class from start to finish. The set was rich and varied with 'No Money, No Love', with its big chorus and powerful, driving groove, alongside the sky scraping melody of 'Waiting For The End Of The World' being two of the standout cuts from the album that were even better live. Perhaps the highlight however was the smouldering 'House Of Blues'; talk about stunning. Retta's vocals were pure gold, passionate and imposing, evoking memories of Paul Rodgers at his very best. If that wasn't enough, Smith's soaring solo was the icing on an already very delicious cake; a modern classic in the making.

Heaven & Earth dipped back into their first album, now nearing its 15th birthday for 'Heaven & Earth' (the song) and 'See That My Grave Is Kept Clean' with Retta's talent matching Turner and Hughes, who sang the originals, note for note. Their take on Deep Purple's 'When A Blind Man Cries' paid respect to the original while making it very much their own with Smith, a long-time friend of Ritchie Blackmore, tapping into the spirit of his mentor with style.

Being bankrolled by self-made millionaire Bruce Quarto (who was so impressed by the band he formed his own record label around them) along with a high profile support slot with the likes of Purple or Whitesnake may just be what it takes to catapult them up to the top table.

Mick Burgess

DEVIN TOWNSEND PROJECT
Nottingham: Rock City
03 July 2014

As I have said before, Devin Townsend is one of the few musicians that I really look forward to experiencing, either on disc or on stage, depending on which Townsend he is of course. Tonight he appeared to be the heavy strapping 'Ziltoid' guy, the one that I find a little more difficult to handle, although he didn't play much from any of those kind of albums. I am sure he won't mind me saying that, as he appreciates, there are two very different sides to him, if you don't like

tonight. The music was, and I didn't think I would ever hear myself saying this, very loud, making it sound like it was from his Strapping Young Lad days, or the 'Ziltoid' album (one song was), which caused Townsend's voice to get lost quite frequently in the music. As is quite common at Townsend's shows, there were the humorous projections at the back of the stage, a favourite of many being the exercising poodles.

Proceedings kicked off with 'Seventh Wave,' or they would have done if Townsend had been able to get a sound out of his guitar, but it was the first night and it wasn't long before things were sorted. Townsend stated that it was very strange for him as, being the first show, his life at that point was very different from what it was twelve years ago. He seemed quite overwhelmed by the reception he got as he continued with 'War,' coming off-stage into the pit to get closer to the crowd, before doing the one 'Ziltoid' track 'By Your Command.' To be fair, the tracks he did were all the heavier ones off the relevant albums, and I'm a much bigger fan of his more Progressive stuff; that said, even the tracks from 'Epicloud', namely 'Liberation' and 'Grace,' were belted out to the extent that I almost didn't recognise them. He was about to play the Sonisphere Festival at the weekend, so probably he ramped it up in preparation for that.

Townsend is a brilliant communicator, and everyone here tonight loved him and he deserved it. He is a brilliant musician and inspired composer; unfortunately, I was a bit too old for the amount of volume tonight.

Andy Brailsford

EXTREME
Manchester: Academy
04 July 2014

Back in 1990, there weren't many Hard Rock albums that created more of a stir than Extreme's 'Pornograffiti', and even less that musically covered so many bases. It only seems like yesterday that Sue and I celebrated our engagement by going to see the band at Manchester's International II and marvelled at the sheer adventurousness of the material, the multi-part harmonies and Nuno Bettencourt's dazzling guitar prowess. The band would come back to Manchester two further times, including this venue on the reunion tour, so it was a little surprising to hear singer Gary Cherone say that Manchester had outsold all other venues on this 25th Anniversary 'Pornograffiti' European tour.

It's actually a long, long time since I last heard a Manchester roar like the one that greeted their intro tape, it's just a shame that the mix was so bad when Extreme launched into the punchy 'Decadence Dance'. Heavily favouring Pat Badger's bass and Kevin Figueiredo's bass drum, Bettencourt's guitar was weak and tinny and Cherone continued to be almost inaudible for the whole of 'Lil Jack Horny' and 'When I'm President' as Bettencourt eventually made himself heard and his phenomenal talent for tasty riffs and solos became apparent. Because of the nature of the record business at the time, playing an album in order means that most of the big songs will be in the first half and Extreme's 'Get The Funk Out' and the number one ballad 'More Than Words' have the band hardly audible for the crowd, a singalong which Cherone seems content just to conduct. By this time the sound has improved considerably and the album continues with the likes of 'Money (In God We Trust)', 'It's A Monster' and the title track.

Barring the superb 'Suzi (Wants Her All Day What?)' and a crushingly heavy 'He-Man Woman



Hater' the end of the set features the more laid back tunes, only the glorious 'Hole Hearted' matching the audience response of the first few numbers. Many who obviously only know the band for the one album or the singles don't bother to stay for the half-hour encore, which is a bit of a relief and leaves a bit more space in the jam-packed, swelteringly hot venue. A frenetic and fun 'Play With Me' from the debut gives way to a trio of tunes from the much maligned 'Ill Sides To Every Story', of which 'Am I Ever Gonna Change?' is the pick, but the band have been so well received that even slipping in 'Midnight Express' from 'Waiting For The Punchline' fails to kill the atmosphere. Tonight was a phenomenal event despite an average performance from Cherone and some dodgy sound issues (which apparently ruined some of the other shows!), but hopefully Extreme will be back again soon with a new album to support.

Phil Ashcroft

**SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY & THE
ASBURY JUKES**
London: 02 Shepherd's Bush Empire
11 July 2014

When the opening act and guest star is Gary U.S. Bonds, you know the night is going to be special - and it was! Southside Johnny, a legend of the Jersey Shore and his band the Asbury Jukes (the greatest bar band in the world) are regular visitors to the U.K. Tonight they put on what, as their tour manager Joe Prinzo said, was their best U.K. show ever.

Bonds started proceedings and belied his years by putting on a great performance and showed off his voice which is still very much there. His big hits (the 1960s 'New Orleans' and the Bruce Springsteen penned early 1980s hit 'This Little Girl') were included in the short set as well as a great version of the Blues classic 'Murder In The First Degree'. Then, on came SJ and the pair performed a fantastic version of the Righteous Brothers' 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling'; all this before the main act started!



Photo: Federico Sestano

After a short interval, SJATAD started off in force with 'Save Me' from Little Steven's 'Men Without Women' album; the classic piano intro and the horn section got the crowd into the swing from the get go. Regarding the band, they were fantastic musicians and singers in their own right; honestly, check them and their back catalogue out on their website as, sadly, there is no space here.

Anyone who has seen SJ live will know his gigs are a celebration of the Jersey sound which is a mixture of all things good from 1950s and 1960s Rock 'n' Roll and a Stax/Motown groove. As a result of this and SJ's frenetic personality, all his songs are full on; SJ and the band just keep playing and didn't wait for the faint hearted!

In this whirlwind of a show, pretty much all the main songs were there including the Springsteen penned 'The Fever' and 'Hearts Of Stone' which both went down a storm. Highlights, and there were many, included 'This Time It's For Real' and SJ's signature song 'I Don't Want To Go Home' (which was apt as a closing track because it was played close to the curfew time).

With two singing legends, a hot band, great songs and an enthusiastic audience, live shows don't get much better than this. On the other hand