

First Aid Kit

+ The Staves

EVOL @ Mountford Hall – 24/10

It's been a long time since I attended a gig at Mountford Hall. Over a decade ago, in fact, to see Motörhead perform. Being back feels like home, although the circumstances this time are much different. Instead of the heavy, rock 'n' roll-infused riffs of the late Lemmy Kilmister, I'm here to listen to Swedish sisters Klara and Johanna Söderberg perform their distinctive brand of indie folk rock. According to their support act, THE STAVES, I'm "in for a fucking treat".

The Staves – a trio comprising sisters Jessica, Camilla and Emily Staveley-Taylor – introduce themselves with a harmonised, intertwining a cappella that stuns the sold-out crowd into silence. This creates a sort of intimacy between the trio and their audience that remains throughout their 30-minute set. It is an unusual feeling – almost ethereal – and at times I forget I am in a packed 2,300-capacity venue; the silence only breaking in between each song to rapturous applause.

The Staves, just like FIRST AID KIT, have been described as folk, but their compositions and lyrical content are dark, brooding harmonies hinting at a band that, despite the beauty displayed in their voices, are just as pissed off as the rest of us. "Oh, I'm tired as fuck. Oh, I'm tired as fuck. Dry my eyes on the back of my sleeve and do my coat up."

As guitarist Klara and bassist Johanna take the stage, followed by their live band – Melvin Duffy, Scott Simpson and Steve Moore – they waste no time by delving into their latest album, *Ruins*, performing *Distant Star* and the single *It's A Shame*. Under the shared spotlight, and in front of a video projection, the Söderberg sisters sing in perfect harmony. Unable to contain their excitement from the crowd, they play various tracks from 2012's *The Lion's Roar* and 2014's *Stay Gold*, including *Master Pretender*.

The highlight of their set comes when Klara switches her acoustic for an electric guitar and begins strumming with more ferocity than First Aid Kit's usual low-key folk sound. Her vocals become hoarser as she declares, "I am so sick and tired of this world". This is First Aid Kit's non-album single *You Are the Problem Here*, a song written in reaction to sexual assault and rape culture. "You are the problem here. No one made you do anything... and I... hope you fucking suffer."

Addressing the song afterwards Klara and Johanna question why it is the victims of sexual assault that are asked questions pertaining to temptation; challenging them as if they are somehow at fault. First Aid Kit's message is clear. Victims of rape should not be blamed. If you rape, you are the fucking problem, and, to the loudest applause of the night, Klara declares "this is a song we wish we didn't feel the need to write... This is our sexual assault protest song".

From their latest EP, *Tender Offerings*, First Aid Kit perform the track *Ugly*, a song about compromising who you truly are in an effort to gain the affections of others. It is quite the contrast to the previous song, but no less important in its message. "Oh, if I'm ugly, I am still so much more than that. I'm so much more than you'll ever know."

For their encore, First Aid Kit begin by playing the song that bears the name of this tour: *Rebel Heart*. And now I'm singing along. There is something about this particular song that gives me Fleetwood Mac vibes – particularly the warmth of their 1977 album *Rumours*. *Fireworks* soon follows, before First Aid Kit finish their set with *My Silver Lining* to an appreciative audience. Smiles stretching from each of their faces as they embrace the applause on what has been a night of sadness, anger, self-reflection and uplifting Americana.

Ken Wynne / @attackplanetb



First Aid Kit (Keith Ainsworth / arkimages.co.uk)



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The Blinders

+ White Room

+ The K's

I Love Live Events @ Arts Club – 29/10

Society is under scrutiny tonight. The people in this room are tired of the political state of the world. We sing along to music that encapsulates what it is to stand by your morals and say what many refuse to. With Brazil's new far-right leader being appointed only yesterday, THE BLINDERS' musical "fuck you" to societal norms, in the form of their debut album *Columbia*, packs even more of a punch now than it did upon first listen.

THE K's explore the monotony of life. Their music seems ill fitting when compared to that of WHITE ROOM and The Blinders. The band certainly retaining more of a mainstream indie vibe than their counterparts tonight. Their biggest hit, *Sarajevo*,

seems to have been on just about every one of my Spotify Daily Mix playlists, and has never been skipped, I can assure you. Instrumentally, the band seem very positive, but their cynical lyrics take you by surprise. Hailing from Earlestown, this band have grown up in the shadows of Manchester and Liverpool, something that could explain their uniquely non-generic, conforming, confusing musical production.

With his crisp suit, bleached hair and blue eyeshadow, Jake Smallwood steps on stage. White Room's frontman displays clear evidence Bowie influence. His gruff vocals are complemented by the spacey sounds produced by Josie McNamara (bass, vocals). Together the five piece's twisted exploration of the landscape they inhabit is captivating. With it being so close to Halloween, it would be ridiculous not to boast of the appropriate nature of their psychedelic, eerie, dystopian tune, *Cannibal Song*. Everyone is in awe of this twisted cinematic thriller.

The signature black streaks seen on the front cover of *Columbia* are smeared down Blinders frontman Thomas Haywood's face. Sexism and toxic masculinity are banned from

entering this space, but leftist ideas and forward-thinking politics are very much at home. The Blinders' new wave political punk tears apart what we as a society accept as norms; they rebuke them. *Free The Slave* sums them up; they want to reject reality and carve the way for a new world. The song itself is arguably the most powerful comment on society from the music industry since "you are sleeping, you do not want to believe", once sung by The Smiths and Morrissey. While The Blinders' chant is certainly less concise than the Mancunian legends', in today's political climate, it seems that subtlety will not get you far. Brash actions are needed. This band have witnessed the effects of right-wing politics first hand, hailing from the ex-coal mining town of Doncaster, and their debut album observes not just the struggles close to home, but in every winner-takes-all society around the globe.

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