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Xavier Rudd - Bristol Academy (30/7/08)



An tipodean singer/song writer Xavier Rudd is a multi-tasker in the extreme. Remaining stage left for the majority of the Bristol concert, Rudd surrounded himself with a dizzying layout of drums, didgeridoos and chimes. Not only this, but a live drummer helped him to belt out a wide range of material from his previous two albums, while also finding time to showcase songs from his forthcoming *Dark Shades of Blue* LP.

A stomping rendition of the Food In The Belly album's title track kicked things off nicely. The opening fifteen minutes of Rudd's performance had the audience bouncing uncontrollably to a heady fusion of throbbing lap-guitar riffs and huge, almost tribal beats. With the tempo already unquestionably high, it was interesting to see which direction he took after that.

Whether going it alone with the didgeridoos for a hypnotic version of 'Mana' or slowly building anticipation and momentum with 'Messages' (one of the evening's highlights), the gig provided concrete proof of Xavier Rudd's charm as a performer. He has both dexterity and humility on his side, and his instrumental quality was consistently backed up by a distinctive, heart-felt vocal style.

New material aired seemed varied and exciting in equal measure, combining hints of chilled-out ska and harmonica-soaked reggae one moment, Hendrix-sized jams the next. As ever, listeners were in for a genre-surfing piece of work. With the fresher, lesser-known stuff barely finished, the crowd's biggest cheers of the night erupted to greet the opening of 'Let Me Be', another enduring fan favourite.

This gig witnessed everything from the protagonist's Aboriginal chanting to ridiculously quick displays of bongo-beating. While the introduction of 'John' on banjo ensured a more traditionally folkly encore, in true spirit the penultimate song descended into an upbeat, feel-good hoedown of sorts.

Someone like Xavier Rudd seems tailor-made for the live context. His songs, while impressive on record, come to life even more in the presence of a watching throng. His near-faultless manipulation of such a remarkable array of instruments will only serve to consolidate his reputation the more performances he gives. Not only is he a cracking performer, but hats off to the guy too for beginning to dispel one of modern life's more prominent gender-related myths - that men can't multi-task.

Rating: 4/5

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