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JEFFERSON STARSHIP

BACK IN LONDON with a tree about to blossom

Live at 100 Club - 1st August 2008

Kantner's crew assembled in London for the second of two nights playing before their London fanbase and some joyous Americans holidaying here and hardly believing their own eyes at this week's gig listings. Focus on the previous night's performance was the 'Surrealistic Pillow' pivotal album which of course featured Grace Slick, fresh from Great Society. Friday night in the humid metropolis however was to celebrate what would have been J Garcia's birthday and include takes on the 'Blows Against The Empire' set and the first to bear the 'Jefferson Starship' name. It is pleasing to report that yes, the Earth did move again and key to this was the singing and great presence of blonde chanteuse Cathy Richardson who managed to sing the back off the 'Grace' songs, include soulful numbers on which she sounded not a million miles from the fabulous Nikka Costa, slink into a Little Feat groove with consummate ease AND play a lively harmonica break later in the show. No wonder that cosmic sage Paul Kantner looked so pleased with her efforts, how DOES he find 'em ?? A warm reception from the crowd seemed to lift her right up there into stage catharsis. Big shoes to fill, but what a talented lady...

Your scribe rarely feels jealous (having once shaken hands with Howlin' Wolf) but Kantner's set of Rickenbacker stage guitars turned these blue eyes a tinge of green. With these, Paul pushes the band through all kinds of moods getting the best out of his cohorts and aided by keys/bass stalwart Chris Smith. Unless I am mistaken Tony Morley was sitting in for drummer Prairie Price who should be here touring soon with T Rundgren. Meanwhile TR keys/guitar man John Ferenzik was played lead guitar in tonight's lineup. All bases covered, then. Aside from a china-breakin' guitar guest spot from Roxy Music man Phil Manzanera, this was the group firing up the evening but on guitars and sublime vocals was QMS veteran Dave Freiburg. He, Kantner and Richardson combine of course for a strident chorale which has character, presence and isn't one iota clinical or over-rehearsed. The set included 'Pride Of Man' which still has an insistent ominous quality.

Not enough can be said about Kantner's guitar work – he often lets a chord ring and then picks out chiming counterpoint passages, across time but lifting the music and giving it a 3-d sound. The material chosen tonight is a veritable folkrock celebration and the upcoming 'Tree of Liberty' set should cement this statement. We get charged versions (not 'covers'!!) of 'Kisses Sweeter Than Wine' (played at Paul's son's wedding, he muttered), 'Follow the Drinking Gourd' with a bluesy Hot Tuna edge, 'Chimes of Freedom'

with a regal chorus and crisp drumming and ‘Get Together’ which makes more sense than ever in a world ravaged by conflicting ideologies and synthetic spiritual tussling. As for Jefferson ‘own’ or adopted material, how about a spirited Freiburg on a yearning ‘Jane’, a biting ‘White Rabbit’, or ‘Somebody To Love’ with a U2 quote before the song bursts into life and the audience sing as loud as the group ? Cathy Richardson sustains an energetic show, adding just-so percussion touches here and there and semiconducting the rhythm section through the trickier tempos and changes, even breathing life into Phil Ochs’ dour ‘I’m Not Marching Any More’.

As Ernie Isley once told me backstage – ‘you’re always gonna leave out SOMEone’s favourite tune..’ so no ‘Other Side..’ tonight, but the iced country warning that is ‘Lawman’ is included and possibly the highlight of the show. With the rerelease of ‘Bark’ here (see review on site) I have been playing this cut to death and Cathy does it justice, Smith’s solemn keys setting the mood.

A clever blend of Marley and Lennon starts the encores before Kantner accedes to an audience cry for ‘Volunteers’ to the delight of the assembled fans, some of whom seem by all appearances and apparel to have slept in a cupboard in Haight Ashbury for forty years, emerging for a tonic refuelling from surely one of the greatest examples of acoustic/electric/vocal alchemy that this planet’s culture has ever produced. And when these guys suggested we treat politicians with a measure of distrust way back then, they weren’t wrong were they ? All I know is that my own humble musical efforts were and still are influenced by these people and there was no better place to be than the 100 Club tonight

Pete Sargeant www.fairhearing.co.uk



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