



Reviewing: Liverpool, The Magnet, 17th September 2005

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## 'SONGDOG'

'Liverpool, The Magnet, 17th September 2005'

- Genre: 'Alt/Country'

Our Rating: ★★★★★★★★

SONGDOG took to the stage tonight following what can only be described as some fairly dreadful local 'music', entering an arena that even the Romans would have considered harsh.

Not that the crowd were baying for blood or anything of that nature but simply because everything seemed so disorganised, wilfully amateurish and, quite frankly, insulting for a band of Songdog's quality and sensibilities.

So the first thing that both surprised and pleased me was the attitude with which they approached the show, giving it their very best from the outset, and ensuring that those of us there to hear them got the best deal possible. And what a deal it was!

Songdog, led by the considerable literary talents of Lyndon Morgans, offered up a simply exquisite set of atmospheric, beautifully textured and lovingly performed musical poems. Morgans himself, armed with an acoustic guitar and a voice that breathes his words at us like the comforting steam from a warm bath, lures us into his lyrical world where we become party to tales of the ordinary and everyday that, through his clever wordplay and intense delivery, become huge reflections on love, life and death where tragedy and pathos lurk behind every shop-window, street corner or bruised memory.

It's for the other two members of Songdog, Karl Woodward (guitars/mandolin/piano/harmonica) and Dave Paterson (Keys/effects/glockenspiel/drums) to create the textures and tensions, the bitter and the sweet that highlight the to and fro of the songs, pulling at their emotional core and rendering Morgans' words hopelessly and helplessly stripped, as real and bare and human as a punch in the eye, a nervous stutter or a lover's "noise I make when I cum" ('Republic Of Howlin' Wolf'). They do so lovingly and apparently effortlessly.

With Morgans a self-confessed Beatles fan it was totally appropriate and so humanly corny that they should open the set, here in 'Beatle City', with 'One Day When God Begs MForgiveness' (from new album 'The Time Of Summer Lightning'), with it's references to Strawberry Fields Forever ("I lost my cherry to...") and Rubber Soul ("I fell in love to...").

Also from the new album we get the aforementioned 'Republic Of.' which is simply stunning, 'The Sky Was So Blue It Was Scary', 'Childhood Skies' and 'Fairytale'. Manager Corrinne joins the band to help on vocals for 'Gigolo Moon' and also on new single, a strangely twisted and forlorn version of The Clash's 'Janie Jones'. 'Jezebel' from 'The Way Of The World' album is described as country music (it isn't, quite), dedicated to Johnny Cash and about performing cunnilingus in a cemetery. From the same album, 'Goodbye Isabel' is gentle and yearning, full of regret, the music like something from the Betty Blue soundtrack.

At times they're so skewed and dream-like that they make me think of the band in Twin Peaks (and there is something eerily similar about the lay-out and decor of The Magnet). About three-quarters through the set I realise that there's something about Songdog that skirts the music of americana and alt.country, never quite leaving their romantic Welshness behind, but reminding us that this envelope we lazily call "americana" isn't just about 'country/folk' music but holds so much more, like the words of Kerouac, Chandler and Ginsberg, the art of Rothko and Warhol, films by Lynch, Ford, Peckinpah, and the sadness of Coltrane.

Tonight Songdog presented us with all the sad, mundane and ordinary things from their lives, in words and music that were stroked by the brush of genius, lit by a cinematic glow and soaked with a beat style and attitude - and it felt like it was just for us. Extraordinary!

author: Christopher Stevens

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