

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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Muse

Thebarton Theatre

It is only eight months since we saw UK band Muse at Big Day Out, but now they are back with more fans and a lot more fanfare. Their stocks have risen with the release of their latest album, *Absolution*, a recent tour with The Cure, and their steady determination to prevail. There have been comparisons - with Radiohead, for instance, and the latter end of Britpop - but increasingly, Muse is taking inspiration from such brazen exhumations of the flamboyant as The Darkness and the We-Will-Rock-You community singalongs of the Queen revival.

And, as a trio, they carry the time-honoured imperative to make a sound grandiose enough for twenty. There are legendary exceptions (or do I mean exemptions ?) such as Hendrix and Cream - but mostly the power trio is an exercise in overkill. Emerson, Lake and Palmer, of course, come horribly to mind. There is no doubting that main Muse-ician, Matthew Bellamy is a clever fellow and, as songwriter, guitarist and guest Rachmaninov, he is a model of diligence, but there is something about the band that doesn't summon up the Nine Goddesses their ponderous name implies.

Taking the stage at Thebarton some twenty four hours later than originally scheduled, the band, bathed in a spray of purple light, takes up positions. On raised platforms are drummer Dominic Howard and (match-fit after a broken wrist) bassist Chris Wolstenholme, while Bellamy, in frock-coat, is down close to the amps ready to conjure feedback and effects of apocalyptic proportions. They open in a thunder of drums with, what I take to be *Butterflies and Hurricanes* - although, in the age of the Buried Vocal and the transferable nature of the Muse riff, I am not completely sure. Bellamy's near-falsetto rises over the cavernous rhythm and, with those catchy chorus hooks, the front rows are already in a tidal rapture of waving arms.

Matthew Bellamy then occupies the keyboard for another Muse signature moment - the choppy Sabre Dance figure from *Microcuts* - which would have had the punters ready for all-night cossack dancing had the Maestro not traded the Roland for some white-noise guitar. The set is unfolding at frantic pace - *Stockholm Syndrome*, is it ? (If not the song, it is certainly the

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concept) *Citizen Erased* and, another riffy favorite from the first album, *Muscle Museum*. After the particularly kitsch keyboard cascades of *Screenager*, Bellamy abruptly leaves, while the other two Muses - Calliope and Polyhymnia, perhaps - puddle some thinking music for several minutes.

“Fooking goat leg I had last night,” confides Matthew Bellamy on his return - in his first and only exchange with the audience. It seems the poor fellow has got the shits. I am wondering whether playing that tosh in *Screenager* might not have contributed also. Anyway, something has been released, because the veil has fallen from in front of three vertical back-projection screens and, spelling out the lyrics of *Ruled by Secrecy*, begins the most sophisticated digital visuals I’ve yet seen. There are cameras everywhere, picking up the musicians - especially, with fish-eyed, reverential close-up - Matthew Bellamy caressing the ivories for *Bliss*, readying for *Sunburn* and breaking into the gloriously anthemic strains of *Time is Running Out*.

Back for two encores - *Apocalypse Please* and *Plug in Baby* - Muse call in time of death at just on eighty minutes. They have worked flat stick with some clever pop and some (belatedly) glitzy production and if the fans get any happier they’ll melt. But I find the discrepancy between the music and the introverted presentation all too ... bemusing. I prefer the Way of The Darkness - prop one leg on the monitor and look as fooking bombastic as you sound.