

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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David Byrne

Norwood Concert Hall

Talking Heads, as their name suggests, were very much a high concept band and, like other Seventies exponents of art pop such as Devo and Kraftwerk, their's was a studied, highly theatrical persona. So it is not just refreshing, but a complete surprise, to find Talking Head frontman David Byrne so affably direct as he lights up the stage at the Norwood Concert Hall.

With a platinum quiff and dressed in matching grey shirt and slacks, the impish Byrne looks like a rather natty locksmith as he greets a seriously adoring crowd of late forty-somethings, primed for a close look into the eyeball of one of late 20th century culture's more interesting Heads. He is going to open, he tells us, with a tune used for the soundtrack of *Dirty Pretty Things - Glass, Concrete and Stone*, from his highly-crafted Nonesuch CD *Grown Backwards*. The band is as sharp as a pin - Paul Frazier on bass and vocals, percussionist Mauro Refosco and drummer Graham Hawthorn - all tangling with a relaxed and agile Byrne, while the Texas-based Tosca Strings, as young and beamish as they are accomplished, bow up a storm.

The set is a mix of old and new, arcane and lovingly familiar. Byrne delivers staccato Dada (*I Zimbra ?*) from *Cafe Voltaire* and *The Great Intoxication* from the under-rated *Eyeball* album, and then it is back to the Golden Years - *Road to Nowhere*, the arcadian *And She Was* and the irresistible riff of *Once in A Lifetime*. Those hardwired to songs about buildings and food are in a swoon. One zealot seated behind me is treating the occasion as his only personal karaoke much to the outrage of those nearby. A major dust-up is only averted by the broad-shouldered gentleman next to me reaching back and restraining the unwelcome soloist until security comes along.

David Byrne is oblivious to these finer details of crowd control. Instead he is investigating everything from vernacular opera - a charmingly crooned *Un di Felice, Eteera* from *La Traviata* - to esoteric Hendrix (*One Rainy Wish* from *Axis Bold as Love*) and Cole Porter's (theme for our fifth row vocalist, perhaps) *Don't Fence Me In*. But it is the Heads material that kicks in - *Psycho Killer* - a fafafafafafa better thing, the recent treasure *Like Humans Do*, and, from the *Naked* album, a prophetic howl of New York City paranoia, *Blind*.

With the band in a fluent groove and the Toscas stringing along in perfect sync the music is fast, loud and light. David Byrne does some of the old moves - reverse marches and back-of-the-stage duck walks - only to reappear to sing *Heaven*, with vox angelica, and the X-Press 2 club hit, *Lazy*, with enough style and clever irony to show that David Byrne is not just the Same as He Ever Was, he is growing forwards as well.