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Carina Round, Water Rats, London

17th December 2007



There's no logic in a world where tickets to see certain bands in massive venues sell out in 5 minutes and other - often more talented - artists don't quite sell out little venues. I consider this tonight as I stand waiting at the front of the stage at Water Rats, a moderately sized theatre in Kings Cross, pressed up against a speaker in the crush of bodies that extends halfway back into the room. The place is packed but bearably so and there's a buzzy atmosphere - one benefit of your musical heroes being less well known than they should be is that everyone who comes to see them headline is already a fan, another is getting to stand three feet away from her as she performs.

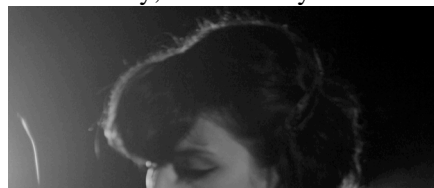
All at once the lady herself is here, resplendent in a black dress and bright red heels, shuffling casually around the stage setting herself up. There's a distinct lack of bandmates present, but no-one's complaining as Carina Round launches in to an acoustic version of 'Slow Down', a track from her latest album *Slow Motion Addict*. As she croons lovingly into the mic, her perfect honeyed vocals and animated facial expressions hypnotising the audience, it's clear we're all in for a very special night.

Later Round becomes chatty between songs, saying hello from her band, thanking support band Lupen Crook And The Murderbirds for being great tour mates, offering self deprecating comments ("You can take the girl out of Wolverhampton...") and treating us to detailed descriptions of her various body parts sweating under the heat of the stage lights. It's a playful side to her personality that has less room to manoeuvre in the full band shows and it's a real treat tonight.

The songs sound more intense too, somehow, stripped back to acoustic guitar and dominated by that voice, at turns sweet and innocent, dipped in jazz blues and howling in a banshee wail. 'Ready To Confess' ends with blood curdling screams, from which Round immediately recovers to say a polite "thank you" in to the mic before playing a lovely, lilting version of 'Paris', a song from 2004's *The Disconnection*.

Next up, 'Into My Blood' has a dark edge to it as Round beats her chest with fury and spits out the lyrics, "Watch the people get tricked out of time / Every dream they had passing them by". You wonder how close to the bone that line is for her at the moment - having relocated to LA for undisclosed reasons - living in a country where Katie Melua sells records and people largely ignore yours must get a tad annoying though, yes? - it must be a strange and emotional experience to be back on home soil following her recent slot opening for Annie Lennox on her US tour.

New songs 'Backseat' and 'Thief In The Sky' get an airing next. For the first she is joined on stage by a couple of half cut mates who join in on the choruses, as do the rest of the audience after a pre-song training session from the giggling Round. There's a lovely moment at the end where everyone stops singing and looks around, beaming - a nice reminder of the continuing relevance of live gigs in these days of You Tubing and My Spacing. 'Thief In The Sky' is all pretty plucked guitar and melancholy vocals with dreamy, evocative lyrics. A mesmerising looped section ends the song, Round deftly layering up vocal parts to magical effect. Modest as always, she plays it all down afterwards, claiming fear every time she uses the loop pedal that it will all go horribly wrong. Tonight it works like a charm.



The semi-legendary 'Let It Fall', from debut album *The First Blood Mystery*, completes the set proper. It's a heady performance of a song brimming with raw emotion even now, years after the issue that prompted her to write it (her father's abandonment of her family





when she was little and her thoughts and fears about meeting him again as an adult) has been more or less laid to rest (so she says). It's an emblem of her writing style at its best - delicately crafted and densely packed with poetry, love, lust, pain and sorrow. Her ability to switch in a nanosecond from soaring, lyrical vocals to stabs of screaming anguish and back again is jaw-dropping, literally - I witness audience members' eyes ablaze and mouths gaping with surprise during the spoken word section of the song as the lyrics pour from Round with otherworldly animation.

Immediately afterwards, of course, she's all shy smiles and sweetness, thanking the audience. She beckons Lupen Crook and his Murderbirds back on stage to join her for a cover of Neil Young's 'Like A Hurricane', Crook himself dolled up in Halloweenesque makeup and one of her dresses. It's a fun ending to a very special evening, and, for everyone on stage, a very special tour. After a one-off Wolverhampton show in January, who can say when Carina Round will return to the country who appreciates her so little? All we can hope is that she finds somewhere she can continue making music and we can

continue to appreciate her from afar.

Set List

Slow Down, Motel 74, How I See It, Ready To Confess, Paris, Into My Blood, Backseat, Thief In The Sky, Let It Fall, Like A Hurricane

Laura Kidd