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Kristin Hersh, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London

26th March 2008



As she takes to the stage with a shy smile, dressed simply in white, Kristin Hersh gives a humorous warning - “I should say this show isn’t normal. Like, dude, it’s ART”.

Famed for her banshee howl and math-rock guitars in super cult band Throwing Muses (1981-1997), frenetic punk in current band 50 Foot Wave and sparsely arranged poetic songs on seven solo albums from 1994 onwards, Hersh is not here tonight to play a ‘normal’ show, but to perform the London debut of her new spoken word project. *Paradoxical Undressing* is a set of readings from her forthcoming memoir accompanied by music and film, set tonight in the rather grand surroundings of the Southbank Centre’s Queen Elizabeth Hall.



It’s a compelling performance. Hersh stands centre stage in front of a large video screen upon which images shift and slide around, playing guitar as she reads from a music stand. The material is at times silly, funny, laugh-out-loud hilarious, turning on a pin to become terribly sad and affecting. She’s had a fascinating life so far and has a gift for telling her stories in a frank and open, yet beautifully poetic way.

This isn’t a show made just for fans - it’s a completely different approach. There is plenty here that will be of interest to diehard followers keen to hear stories of Throwing Muses offstage - drinking orange soda because they were too young to get beer on their rider - “it’s embarrassing” - driving home from shows in the “Silver Bullet”, Kristin’s beaten up old car that doesn’t really go - or stop - and her bandmates trying to kill a mouse by spraying it with hairspray then toasting it - but there’s so much more to “Paradoxical Undressing” than a behind-the-scenes look at a woman in a band.

Between tales of stained apartments, mental illness, strobe happy soundmen (“It looks cool, but it makes you play retarded”), hanging out with invisible rats, swimming as a drug (“I made it my heroin because junkies are so sad”), vocal advice from Hollywood star Betty Hutton (“Fall in love, Kristie!”), a car crash where her foot came off, becoming pregnant and being given elephant shit sandals as a present, the lights drop and Hersh is silhouetted against the video screen as she plays shortened versions of songs like ‘Cathedral Heat’, ‘Delicate Cutters’ and new track ‘Slippershell’. Taken away from the traditional noisy gig setting the songs are even more evocative and immediate; comfortably seated with all eyes and attention on Hersh the audience don’t miss a beat. It’s mesmerising.

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