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St Vincent, 229, London

5th September, 2007



It's already dark as I reach 229, a clean, shiny venue tucked away under Great Portland Street in Central London. As I bemoan the end of summer and the start of shorter evenings, I become distracted by the array of gadgets and machinery set up on the small stage, just as Annie Clark herself - the woman behind St Vincent - hops up to fiddle with a guitar pedal here, a drum machine there.

The 24 year old Texan - previously known for her work with The Polyphonic Spree and Sufjan Stevens - has just released her debut solo album *Marry Me*: a sonic masterpiece fusing jazz, rock and pop sensibilities with a mixture of both serious and tongue-in-cheek lyrics delivered in sweet, elegant vocals. "It's utterly sincere but it's not...you know what I'm saying?", she quips between songs later on in the show.

Live, it's just Annie and her toys: a pedal board full of guitar effects on the floor in front of her, a drum pad to her right, a drum machine on a stand to her left (used to loop patterns round live), two microphones (one with a wonderful old fashioned 'radio' effect on it) and one red guitar. This is much more intricate than your run-of-the-mill solo performance but she multi-tasks effortlessly, creating rhythm loops and building up layers of sounds, some on click track and some produced live, with weird and wonderful guitar sounds taking precedence and her delicate but definite vocals slotting in over the top.



Bathed in pink light, she is immersed in the music, shaking her head so that her hair covers her face, and one eye peers intently out at the crowd. Onlookers watch transfixed, as an immense sound emanates from the stage. 'Paris Is Burning' and 'Red Lips' have a savage music box quality to them, and Annie's fingers wiggle up and down the fret board as if on autopilot while she presses buttons with her feet and swaps between microphones, essentially performing her own backing vocals.

After such intense music it's a bit of a surprise that she's so jolly between songs, chatting to the crowd in a clear, sweet voice. "I'm really glad that I flew across an ocean to be with you guys, this is really fun", she smiles as she launches in to her next track, 'My Baby Had To Go', a song about a woman who kills her boyfriend. During each song Annie's totally absorbed in the performance, her wide eyes, raised eyebrows and nodding head explaining things to the audience in an almost theatrical way. It's intimate and compelling; you feel a connection to her as she spins her strange tales of love and hate.

A cover of The Beatles' 'Dig A Pony' uses short, rhythmic tapped out chords in the verses with full blown overdrive in the choruses, the tempo ebbing and flowing sensitively to match the vocals. The drum pad gets a kicking as Annie starts stomping her foot down towards the song's end; it's a hit with the audience, who have been rooted to one spot throughout each song (but applaud with whoops and hollers after each as well).

A laid back version of 'Now Now' is the last song of the main set and shows off Annie's phenomenal guitar skills with incredibly complex parts shifting under the calm vocals. A big fuzzed-up thrash section fades to a low hum, and all of a sudden she's thanking the audience and running off stage - but almost immediately she's back for an encore, asking for all the lights to be turned off. "Darkness is a great equaliser...can you smell magic in here?" 'What Me Worry' is then performed in absolute pitch darkness

and the atmosphere is just as special as she'd hoped.

As I head out in to the night I'm left wondering how many St Vincent shows people will see before they can get appreciate the music, instead of gawping and incessantly taking photos with their mobile phones. What Annie does is very impressive - it looks effortless and sounds wonderful, but I was disappointed to find that people weren't able to let go and enjoy the magic she was working so hard to create for them.

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Laura Kidd

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