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Live Review

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:: The Flaming Lips :: Stardeath & White Dwarfs ::

11 November 2009 / Troxy Ballroom / London

By Liz Tray

If you can go to a gig and smile throughout isn't that something worth celebrating? Yellow and orange balloons bounce onto your head; you raise your hands to the sky as confetti drips over you like psychedelic rain. A pair of oversized hands bookend the stage as the band emerges from a giant LED vagina. A Flaming Lips show is a unique experience.

But this vagina entrance, is not the first time we glimpse the talismanic Wayne Coyne. He took a position, grinning, by the onstage mixing desk to hear the support, his nephew's band, Stardeath & White Dwarfs. Then he pounced onstage during the changeover to make sure everything was set up properly, something you suspect he'd been doing since load in. The lengthy soundcheck/instrument tuning featured the whole band. Finally, Wayne's health and safety lecture followed then a quick dash off before emerging for the show. The Lips do things a little differently.

Incidentally, Stardeath were really rather good. Swirling guitars and pulsating bass, if not a little too much strobe light, and their fantastic cover of Madonna's *Borderline*, made for an enjoyable support slot. It's testament to the power of the Flaming Lips show and songs that their previous stage cameos took nothing away from *Race For The Prize*, the joyous bouncy opener. Sure, it's a shtick in and of itself, the circus in front of you. But it just feels so good, makes you glow from the inside. Other rock shows can only look pedestrian in comparison. It's a good job their music is as brilliant as it is, otherwise it'd just show up a great spectacle with nothing behind it. Fortunately, having just released their 12th album, the Lips know what they are doing.

The audience was dazzled, taking whatever was thrown, literally and figuratively, whether it was the searing *See The Leaves* from new album *Embryonic*, or a glowing singalong of *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*. Even their tendency to pause for applause near the end of songs before they're over, several times, never feels annoying or contrived. Everything is endearing and charming with enigmatic support on bass provided by longtime member Michael Ivins and, the musical driving force and all round genius, Steven Drozd, on guitars and keyboards.

It's a collective, with touring drummer Kliph Scurlock and a whole host of animal costume clad friends at both sides of the stage. But the focal point is always rock philosopher Wayne Coyne, clad in his usual linen suit with wild greying hair and beard. It's his show, the hands-on ringmaster pulling all the chaos together with his beautiful almost Neil Young sounding voice. He creates a chaotic kind of control, as he rolls on the audience's heads inside a giant plastic ball. It was a gig that had everything – thumping riffs on *The W.A.N.D.*, the gentle *Fight Test* and the cathartic *Do You Realize??* to finish.

I'm sure, reading a recent Pitchfork set of fan comments, that their 'real' (read: pre Yoshimi) fans resent this current incarnation. That it's become all about the show and their music is not what it was. The classic sour grapes from the 'I liked them 15 years ago' brigade. Once they were a well-kept secret, now they are at the big cult band end of the spectrum, but I don't see what the complaining is about. The music is wonderful; the show is unusual and creates happiness in a crowd of people usually, given its London, full of cynicism. They need us to complete the show; it's a contract between performer and listener. Too many bands have disdain for their audience, this band see us as crucial parts of the show. They can't do it without us. I walked out of the Troxy feeling high as a kite, wishing more gigs were like this. When I got home and took off my shirt, half a dozen bits of yellow and orange confetti fell out and spiralled to the floor. All gigs should feel like this.

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- Dead Confederate..
- Anthony Harris..
- The Lounges..
- Ex Wives..
- Heads We Dance..
- The Bambinos..
- Lost Prophets..
- Kid Harpoon..
- Slow Club..
- Basement Jaxx..
- Quartershade..
- The Duke & The King..
- Straight Lines..
- Spectrum 7..
- Dan Lyth..
- Beans On Toast..
- Thea Gilmore..
- Bicycle Thieves..
- Run Toto Run..
- Roy Smiles..
- Danny Mahon..
- Hayabusa..
- The Mekkits..
- Lazy Two..
- Lifeless..
- The Marder..
- Amateur Assassins..
- Husky Rescue..
- Asobi Seksu..
- Arrows Of Love..
- Blue Roses..
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- French For Cartridge..
- The Drums..
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