

Bittles' Magazine | Live Music

Mute Records artist Cold Specks first popped her head into our world in May of last year with the release of debut album *I Predict a Graceful Expulsion*. An enchanting appearance on Jools Holland also went some way towards announcing the presence of this peculiar talent to the world.

Originally from Canada but now based in London the music of Al Spx sounds like it came from the deepest American South and is steeped in both the joyousness of gospel and the darkest heart of Goth. The album is a quiet tornado that sounds soft and gentle yet is brimming full of indignation and rage. The prospect of hearing these tracks live was lending the hall in which the crowd sat a real air of anticipation. Something which must surely have affected the first of the support acts.



ColdSpecks (c) Autumn deWilde

With long flowing blond hair, tall stature, and boots that seemed to go all the way up to her neck, Prince Innocence singer Talvi Faustmann looked every inch the ultimate rock God. Yet what appeared to be an attack of nerves meant that she spent most of the set attempting futilely to hide behind said hair and dancing in a self-conscious manner. What could be slightly cringe worthy though changes instantly the moment she opens her mouth. To listen to her sing is a truly glorious thing. By turns mournful and triumphant, sleazy, yet elegant, her voice is curiously bewitching.

Her pout which resembled the most sultry of French Goddesses combined perfectly with a sleek sexy persona to make more than a few hearts flutter in delight. The beats, synths, and kitchen sinks were supplied by Josh McIntyre of Little Girls fame. Together they create a sound not unlike the retro disco of Chromatics or Kavinsky. Their romantic synth-pop sound was lush and swooning and would sound perfect in a darkly lit nightclub with a single girl dancing in the middle of the room with her eyes tightly closed.

With a back-story that marketing managers would kill for, second support act Phildel arrived on stage in an elegant symphony of sound. Looking radiant and almost overly professional for someone whose debut album *Disappearance of a Girl* is only now due for release she had a mesmerising stage presence. Backed by a heavily over-emoting keyboardist and someone playing percussion on a book case the support was somewhat lacking. But from the moment she walked on-stage it was plain to see that Phildel was born to be a star. With a voice so

silky smooth you could pour it into a glass she looked and sounded so sweet that in the background you could hear hearts break.

Highlights included opening track Moon Sea and the startlingly beautiful Storm Song. The entire set was strong though and fully merited the hearty applause from the crowd at the end. Who would have guessed that growing up in an overly religiously household where music was completely banned would lead to such startling results! Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned there methinks.

Main act Cold Specks arrives on stage dressed in a long nuns habit like dress looking determined and slightly nervous before launching into an a cappella song that has the entire crowd sit up and take heed. While not a natural front-woman Spx, manages to compensate with a passionate voice filled with both optimism and despair. Her music has been described as 'doom soul' which you can easily hear in songs which capture the spirit of southern gothic perfectly. Yet this lazy label sells the music somewhat short since contained within are ample elements of gospel, blues, soul, folk, rock and more.

A full six piece band on stage helps to fill the physical space which lends a variety to the set that may have otherwise collapsed under a torrent of introspection and soul searching. Spx's interaction with the band members is both jovial and hilarious. And the drums, guitars, keyboard, and horn section combine majestically with Spx's vibrant voice to amazing effect on the handful of rousing rock-like tunes we are given. Steady is a hair raising triumph which utilises the full band to glorious effect.

The vast majority of the songs pass by in a gentle shimmer of a sedate pace. This leads some tracks to appear cluttered though, as with everyone striving for something to do there can be just too much going on. The bass player and trumpeter were, in my opinion anyway, cruelly underused. Set closer Lay me Down was such a highlight of the night because it featured nothing more than Spx's stunning voice and her guitar. When we were treated to such intimacy it felt simple, heart-felt and spiritually rousing.

There were plenty of highlights though with I Predict a Graceful Expulsion (or A Graceful Explosion as I used to think it was called) hitting just the right note of beauty and melancholy to soar into the heavens. Holland with its refrain of 'We are many, we are dust. And to dust, we'll all return.' brings both a tear to the eye and a smile to the lips.

There was a good mixture of old and new songs with Spx admitting that she was getting somewhat sick of playing some of the tunes from her debut album. Yet as the crowd left the auditorium with smiles of satisfaction after a ninety minute soul-searching set it didn't appear as if they would be getting tired of the music any time soon.

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| JOHN BITTLES