

**Badfinger
100 Club
London
March 2017**

Abridged Review – The Carouser – Darius Drew

The 100 Club, as we surprisingly discover upon entrance, is near-rammed, and the roar that greets the band's arrival is one of the loudest I've encountered in all my years of patronising the venue. To put it into perspective, there are over twice as many punters in attendance tonight as there were for mod-proggers Audience's last ever show in 2013- and that was with three out of four originals still present!! So, unless the entire London Welsh Society has wandered down from Grays Inn Road (a possibility which, considering the band no longer boast any Welsh members, is highly unlikely) I think we can consider this a commercially successful venture. What's even more amazing, however, is how artistically successful they are: yep, Jackson's Badfinger are good. And then some.

For starters, Jackson himself is an extremely self-effacing, humble and personable frontman: not only do you immediately warm to his kindly West Midlands brogue, but his deft skills on piano, organ, guitar and lead vocals alike are more than considerable, and with an image hovering somewhere between Macca, Ray Davies and Justin Hayward, he still looks the part into the bargain. Just as commendable are his detailed explanations of precisely what each lyric meant to its departed composer: rather than any form of cynical cash-in, this is evidently an attempt to honour a legacy that demands to be heard. Similarly, while I'm not quite certain of the exact pedigree of guitarist Andy Nixon, bassist Mike Healey and drummer Ted Duggan, they're clearly the men for the task: sprightly, economical and well-versed in the art of understatement, they attack the opening quartet of "Just A Chance" "Know One Knows" "Dennis" and "Baby Blue" with spiky enthusiasm and handle the more melancholy end of the band's oeuvre ("Lost Inside Your Love" "Take It All" "Name Of The Game") with equally requisite sensitivity.

Granted, some may question whether playing five ballads in succession works, especially when curiously followed by several faster numbers: yet as all are (in keeping with the band's Apple-related origins) Beatlesque love songs in the Lennon-McCartney mould, they bear by definition far bouncier meters than your average rock "slowie", and as such, have little difficulty holding one's attention. In any case, Badfinger- much like their US contemporaries Big Star, Emmitt Rhodes and The Raspberries- always were a band of "measured" tempo: though no stranger to rocking out when called upon, the likes of "I Can't Take It" and the Gibbins-composed "In The Meantime" were always more the exception than the rule, and that same maxim still holds true today. That said, though they technically owe everything to the helping hand of the Fab Four, and may not have existed (except possibly in their original incarnation as the more Bee Gees-influenced Iveys) were it not for the intervention of George Harrison.

A man of his word, Jackson promises early on that the show will feature selections from right across the band's history- and feature them it does, right down to the ultra-obscure "I Won't Forget You" from the group's short-lived mid-80s incarnation. What we're not prepared for, however, is two new numbers ("In A Different World" and "Lucky Guy") that bear all the hallmarks of classic 'Finger the very way Ham and Evans would have wanted it: very suddenly, it dawns on us that rather than some cheesy nostalgia act, this is a happening outfit with a genuine future, and the prospect is justifiably thrilling. Furthermore, it is an actual band, as opposed to "one guy from the 70s and three rentablocks": sure, Jackson may be the focal point, but he's more than happy to share the limelight, a fact amply reinforced by Nixon and Healey's skilful redistribution of lead vocals on "Hold On" and "Moonshine".

For Badfinger, presenting their audience with such a prime selection of deep cuts definitely works in their favour: though there's sadly no room for my three personal faves ("Constitution" "Timeless" and "Knocking Down Our Home") they're clearly unafraid to test their fans' mettle, and as such, their adventurous spirit is rewarded with much appreciation and approval. Nonetheless, there are still three or four numbers whose omission would be tantamount to high treason- and duly, a shimmering "Day After Day", a thumping "Come And Get It", a rousing "Without You" (not inspired, as certain Asian reality TV contestants might believe, by the mythical "Ken Lee", but by Pete Ham's first partner Beverley, who's in the house tonight) and a riotous "No Matter What" take their rightful places among the melee. Job done...

I came here tonight part-expecting a ragged, half-hearted tribute-fest: I came away not only having seen a vibrant bona fide rock band, but palpably excited at the prospect of seeing them a second time.

Straight Up, Badfinger are back to kick our collective Ass."