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John Cooper Clarke

The Fleece, Bristol (Sun 27 Nov)

Like a wizened stick-insect love child of 60s-era Bob Dylan and Ronnie Wood with an adenoidal Manc twang, John Cooper Clarke looks the same as he did 30 years ago, give or take a few wrinkles.

The original 'punk poet' or 'bard of Salford' has never lost that sharp anecdotal wit evident in his deliciously barbed and hilarious takes on urban life since the punk days.

Tonight – introduced by The Clash's old road manager Johnny Green – he regales us for a marathon two and a half hours with tales that span everything from supporting Bernard Manning in the early days to advertising jingles, lesbians, euthanasia – you name it.

Clarke these days is more stand-up comic than poet – although the long preambles, peppered liberally with one-liners to die for ("What the fuck does cheese say when it's getting it's photo taken?") and some great, rambling, observational humour do usually lead up to a blast of his staccato-delivered poetry.

Only a few of the old favourites get aired – 'Hire Car', 'I Wrote The Songs', the rouscating bile of 'T'wat', 'Beasley Street' and it's upmarket version 'Beasley Boulevard', and his classic 'Evidently Chickentown' as a finale – but it's the stories that grab the attention.

This is late-night rambling, staggering, swaggering Clarke, with shards of brilliance making up for lack of editing. There's a drop-dead funny tale of U2's Bono, or 'Bongo' as JCC has it, losing his leather trousers and Stetson hat at G20, and having an argument with 'The Hedge' (The Edge) about it; there are Jewish jokes aplenty in-line with his lineage ("...no difference between Catholics and Jews really, only Jews would take a lawyer into the confessional with them"), and his advertising voice-overs (as the voice of Domino's Pizzas he points out that you choose your own toppings, "so it's your own fookin' fault if you don't like the pizza...") among an ocean of hilarity.

Clarke creases up at his own stories and jokes frequently, and there's a warmth in the madness and a madness in the warmth ("Who honestly thinks that Harold Shipman was a cunt? Although they may have a different opinion in fookin' Zurich").

At the end it seems that he's going to go on all night and the crowd have dwindled as it's Sunday and work beckons the next day, but JCC is like the enlightened drunk in the bar with all the best jokes who refuses to leave... anyway, like he says, we can always phone in sick, and if the boss asks how sick we are, tell him we're in bed with our sisters..!

Enter the dragon, exit Johnny Clarke... (Elfyn Griffith)

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THE BIG GIG



Balaké Sissoko Quartet feat. Babani Koné

The distinctive sound of the kora is one of the defining sounds of African music. In skilled hands the '21-stringed African harp-lute' (as radio DJ Andy Kershaw famously used to always describe it) offers the complete musical...

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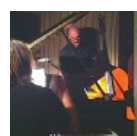
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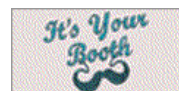
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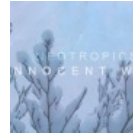
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