

# JP Cooper | Gig Review

**Mandela Hall, Belfast • Thursday 01 June '17**

**By Sade Mtowa**

Belfast's Mandela Hall, was awoken and captivated by the powerful vocals of soulful-folk singer, JP Cooper as he ended his tour. From the line-up outside, to the supporting act, all the way to the crescendo of the night, it was the full package. At first it was a little scarce earlier in the evening, as the early birds, including myself, made their way checking in attendance. Regardless, the hype and excitement was strong walking into the dark hall illuminated by the blood red lights of the stage, shadowing the instruments. Popular of billboard's best seller songs played in the background contrasting the aesthetic of the room. Staff from the bar tenders to the bodyguards were welcoming as the crowd shuffled in during the night.

First up on stage was supporting act Joshua Burnside, easing the audience into the tone of the night. His set in overall had a vibe of a lounge sit down session of the underground. After, during intermission, more and more attendees crept their way in from long time dedicated fans, to new comers and the few in between. From teens with their parents, close nit friends and even couples on date night. Anticipation for Cooper's arrival grew with the voice of the murmuring crowd as they waited patiently. It wasn't long before he graced the stage causing an up roar of screams and cheers and cameras snapping to update their Snapchat and Instagram. Throughout the night each moment was recorded one way or the other. A serious case of FOMO (*Fear Of Missing Out*).

Hat on head, suspenders on lock, shoes to the point, from the word go, the soulful, gospel like voice of JP Cooper projected over the hall. Preforming hit songs 'September Song', platinum hit 'Perfect Strangers' and Fifty Shades Darker song 'Birthday'. As well as, the classics like 'Tell Me What Went Wrong', the whole room watched in silence and admiration, hypnotised by his presence. The rasp of his voice and range of high notes sent shivers down the spine. The keys on the keyboard, strums of the base guitars and heartbeat of the drums from the band, shook you from the core. Bright lights keeping in time with the music and cascading over the audience. Whether in front row or back, every seat was the best seat. Here, was one of the few artist that had a voice for live performances.

JP was humbling, sharing stories about his personal struggles and inspirations for his music. One story which stood out, was the fight to balance family life and work. Three years ago he got signed after covering 'I Wish I Didn't Miss You' by American artist, Angie Stone and went on tour with her. The inspiration for his song 'Closer', a love letter to his son born two years earlier. While singing, you understood the emotions and felt the day those lyrics written down. Showing a more vulnerable side, you were invited into his world and mind set, reaching out to the audience and connecting with them emotionally.

Unfortunately the night was cut as another event was due to take place, (how rude am I right)? But, not all was lost as Cooper ended on the high note he started with, leaving huge grins from ear to ear on the audience's faces as they ventured home for the night.