

Folly and the Hunter, musical love-child of Bon Iver and Bear's Den, self-released their debut album *Residents* in 2011, and since have toured Canada, the US, and Europe. The Canadian indie-folk three-piece has totted up 33,000 monthly listeners on Spotify, where you can find all their albums to date and were scooped up by Canadian record label Outside Music. They went on to release their hauntingly elegant second album *Tragic Care* in 2013. Folly's latest album, *Awake*, is the tour de force of the band, having worked with Canadian music guru Howie Beck to maintain their roots while establishing a seamless blend of traditional American folk and indie post-rock. Folly and the Hunter stopped by Studio 2 in Liverpool's Ropewalks district last week, the perfect backdrop for their understated set.

Although their music develops through the albums, becoming rounder and rich, their humble beginnings prevail, something that is especially evident in their stage presence. Sloping sheepishly onto the charmingly haphazard stage in the small venue, the band tune up while the main vocalist and lyricist, Nick Vallee, chats to the 20 or so people in the audience like that awkward cousin at family Christmas, cracking jokes with delightfully subtle sarcasm and looking anywhere but your eye line. They begin with a couple of slower songs to ease the audience into the somewhat startling intimacy of a gig in what feels like someone's art deco living room. By the time they reach the delicately uplifting '*Travelling*' from their new album, people are smiling and nodding to each other, returning to their content recline and premium lager. The combination of folky riffs and cathartic lyrics was engaging but unobtrusive, intense but uplifting, seeming to provoke something different in everyone there. As someone whose previous live music experiences invariably involved sweating, jumping and moshing, it was refreshing to be able to sit down with a drink that wasn't lukewarm and enjoy the music without having to check if I still had both shoes on.

They ran through pretty much the whole of *Awake* before being politely heckled by two avid Canadian fans, sat a few metres from the stage, for their favourite song. It's not often that requests are heard by the band during a gig, let alone by the front man leaning down over his guitar to listen. Proving that pretence isn't indicative of talent, the other two thirds of the band, Christopher Fox and Laurie Torres, orbited the lead singer, hopping joyfully between instruments like they were born to play all of them. This along with the fluid harmonies and stirring melancholy of Nick's voice gripped the small room and filled it with contemplative warmth. The trio were an exquisite force of electric excitement, smiling at each other like they were playing a sold-out show in Madison Square Garden, and not a small bar in Liverpool on a rainy Tuesday night. They finished off with '*Science*', subdued yet passionate – an apt end to a gig of a similar atmosphere.