

ALBUM REVIEW : Against Me! – ‘23 Live Sex Acts’

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This ‘Against Me!’ article was written by Jessica Otterwell, a GIGsoup contributor

A title like *23 Live Sex Acts* should tell you a little something about how this album will sound, look and feel, even before you play it. For starters, the cover is designed by long term collaborator; artist and one time porn film set dresser, Steak Mtn. The artwork is unapologetic, featuring a severed penis on a plate with a spoon, as its centre piece. ‘Come on in’, it seems to be saying... ‘if you think you can handle it’. Things kick off in set list order, with *Fuckmylife666*, a song title inspired by Grace’s late friend, Pope. The intro is extended, the anticipation of the crowd building, then the band walk on stage, ‘Let’s fuck shit up’ Grace announces, before the band unleash the start of a one hour twenty six minute blast of pure, charged energy.

Stand out moments include a furious rendition of *Walking is Still Honest*, played right after the band have stopped the gig so Laura can berate a security guard for ejecting an audience member. This is a band that is with their fans, for their fans and the live experience is what *Against Me!* are all about, it pours out of them, shines out of them. Songs such as *True Trans Soul Rebel* have audience members singing in unison, ‘does god bless your transsexual heart?’ It is a joyous moment and showcases the journey the band and their fans have been on.

Something this live album does incredibly well is highlight Grace’s gift as a songwriter. Where occasionally, on studio albums, her lyrics are lost in production, here they are open, raw and bleeding from the stereo, begging you to listen. The depth on *Pints of Guinness make you strong*, is evident with its story of Grace’s alcoholic grandfather, ‘and just like James, I’ll be drinking Irish tonight’ the crowd joins in, you can feel the excitement, but just as quickly Grace delivers the line ‘If I had known, just how things would’ve ended up, I just would have let myself die’. There is a melancholy buried in that melody and it’s infectious and it’s real.

Atom Willard and Inge Johansson blend with long standing original member James Bowman, as though this is where they should always have been as a band. Willard’s drumming is ferocious, energized and creative, Johansson adding crazy ad lib bass lines to long term favourites, *I Still Love You Julie* and *The Ocean*.

Production is raw, ragged and fast. Tracks end abruptly; there is no time to waste. This album is very much about the here and the now. Listening to this, there is sweat and the spice of danger. One final singalong on *We Laugh At Danger and Break All the Rules* proves tantalising, you’ll be begging for more.

23 Live Sex Acts is out now on Total Treble