

MEGAreviews

Brian Jonestown Massacre @ The Gov - 03/06/2018

By Michelle McGoldrick



It's a safe bet to say no one goes to a **Brian Jonestown Massacre** gig with expectations. Starting at the merchandise table in the foyer of The Gov, a conversation was overheard: "I love the band t-shirts with Anton on them!" Anton? How could anyone miss the irony of Brian Jones, the founding member of the Rolling Stones, adorning Brian Jonestown Massacre merchandise? The analogy is obvious: if a rolling stone gathers no moss, then the Brian Jonestown Massacre could be described as a band that challenges and shakes assumptions about live music and melodic sonic experimentation because unlike Brian Jones - this band won't fade away.

The band came on stage without introduction and steadily created a melodic dream culminating in a rock out that blistered the night into true sensory overload. With a catalogue of eighteen albums over twenty five years, the band played some hits, a few misses and some newies in a set that lasted two and a half hours without break or encore.

A comment from the crowd was that being at the gig was like watching a band rehearsal: there were lengthy interludes between songs, collaborations unfolded between Anton and band members about arrangements, Anton openly rebuked the band for their playing,

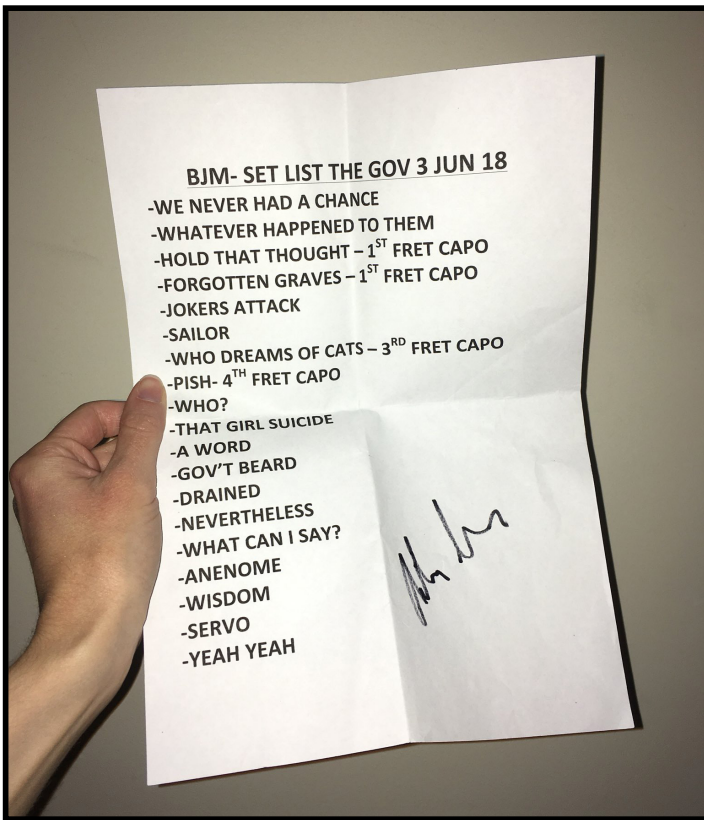
there were multiple guitar swaps and adjustments including broken strings and snapped guitar straps. A bass amp blew a fuse, a few minds were probably blown too.

Anton turned out to be a frail but fearless vocalist on stage, quick to show displeasure and calling frequently to his roadie to assist with sheet music/song lists, or to provide cigarettes for quick drags. But gratefully, there was also banter between the crowd and Anton who explained he had been sick since landing in Australia with a virus. The atmosphere was tense and intense at times and, admittedly, Anton did not look well. The dapper costumes he'd been known to wear were passed over in favour of jeans, greasy hair and a t-shirt slogan: 'Eat Shit'.

But the music stood up: it warmed and flowed with understated complex arrangements - it was mesmerising, unpredictable, stirring and very, very interesting. The foundation of this music is clearly the blues, with Anton's undefinable psychedelic surf guitar creating the overriding magic. There is fear, desire, promise, sun, road trip freedom, dreams, soul, hedonism, destruction - and unexpected tenderness in his delivery. Sorry, you can't take the California out of the boy.

Anton's sensitivities aside, the band's vocal contribution was a mix of traditional and non-lexical vocables that are unique to Brian Jonestown Massacre sound. The bass player and percussionist led the backing vocals in "**Who**" and most of the band joined in on "**Hold That Thought**". Reminiscent of the post-Woodstock era; the band echoed Ray Manzarek keyboards, Velvet Underground mod guitarists in shades, drumming that looked jazz but sounded funk, bass that looked college boy but sounded clean.

All calls for a tambourine solo were duly ignored because the percussionist's presence



onstage is upfront and personable when the rest of the band hide behind sunglasses, their instruments, or Anton's unashamed performance. Really, who could blame them. Gratefully, the sound engineer on the night mixed the set with clarity rather than volume so when different instruments took dominance during the set there was no unnecessary volume. What a waste it would have been to ruin the talent and complexities of the songs in a whitewash of auditory mud.

"This is the best song of our set so it needs to be played on the best guitar" said Anton towards the end of the night. And the last song of the night was off the scale. The intensity kept building until it knocked out two guitarists, the bass eventually receded, Anton lost more strings, and only the drummer was left to wind down the wall of sound into a resolute back beat. The band looked shattered, Anton looked satisfied.

Coming away from the gig there was a pervasive feeling that Anton Newcombe's sound is enduringly real, he functions on a bottomless pit of creativity, and his best is probably yet to come.

"**Something Else**" album by the **Brian Jonestown Massacre** out now on **A Recordings Ltd.**

