

SLIM CHANCE PLAY THE MUSIC OF RONNIE LANE

REFORMED AND UNREPENTANT

100 Club London 26/11/2010



Untidy things often happen in an Untidy world and so it is that I'm stood in the, under threat, 100 Club as The Bottle Brunettes, courageously prepare the ground for the London comeback of Ronnie Lanes backing band Slim Chance and I'm chatting with Rupert Williams, only the bloomin' Co Producer of The Passing Show the film, TV programme and DVD that had done so much to bring Ronnie Lanes place in the grand scheme of things into focus.

Given such an opportunity I thank and congratulate Rupert on such a fine piece of work and even pass on tales of how much my good friend David had enjoyed the programme, almost re discovering Ronnie Lane in the process.

In exchange Rupert tells me tales of getting the film made during quiet times at the BBC where he had worked, and also relays how well the opening gig of the short tour, in Worthen Village Hall, Shropshire, had gone although if the beer really had been £1 a pint as he says maybe it wasn't all that surprising it was a night to try and remember. There'd even, apparently, been a warm up gig down in Kingston which tends to suggest Mr. Simpsons fingerprints?

As ever at 100 Club it's a good, friendly atmosphere and plenty of good pals to chat with, some you've never even met before.

Ronnie Lane, to me, was large and an important part of my musical growth. The Small Faces were sat right there alongside the Beatles Stones Kinks Who and Move for me with barely a Rizlas widths between any of them but one thing The Small Faces had, The Small Faces had humour and seemingly moved a little easier from soulful pop into psychedelic pop than most.

The Faces with Rod Stewart didn't quite inveigle their way so far onto my radar despite a couple of cracking singles and a few gigs, one notably at Earls Court where the sight of George Melly in a tartan suit has left an indelible scar still on my consciousness. But it was with his post Faces music that Ronnie stole my heart, not to mention my unending admiration at dodging a scary bullet when he had the good sense to avoid The Smaller Faces reunion, surely one of the saddest gigs I've ever had to endure.

Such was my affection for Ronnie's music though that I don't think I had noticed, even at the time, just how much my friends and contemporaries weren't sharing my passion.

I cried when Ronnie Lane died; I had always found Harvest Home, from his One for the Road album, to be a beautiful and moving piece of reflective music and so I played Harvest Home and cried and thanked him for the good times and all the happy memories, and then I played the whole album... loud, and had me another good time.

Y'see, Ronnie Lane and Slim Chance in full flight were simply a joyous and uplifting experience; a right good night out, or, as I seem to remember on one memorable occasion, a right good afternoon out although they may well have been The Ronnie Lane Band by then as Ian Stewart, the 6th Stone, was on piano but, whatever, they fair ripped through Fats Dominos Walking to New Orleans; and that was another thing about Ronnie Lane, always had a fine ear for a cover version and, if for nothing else, I am eternally indebted to him for bringing my attention to Leroy Van Dykes splendid, and then some, Walk On By.

I will admit to having had mixed emotions when I first caught wind that Slim Chance were playing 100 Club. Obviously excitement was way up there, a dash of curiosity, and of course a little sadness but eventually it became obvious we had to be there. Checking out the new Slim Chance website a few days before the gig it was good to see some reassuring names and faces, not least Steve Simpson who, somehow, for me epitomised Slim Chance musically and who had equally had me entranced and excited during his time with the still sadly missed Meal Ticket.

Charlie Hart was there too but with all due respect to the rest of the guys, Alun Davies, Steve Bingham, Charlie Davey, all, of course, with sky high Slim Chance credentials, it was the fact that Geraint Watkins was on board that had the engine revving.

The Bottle Brunettes battle valiantly, as support bands surely must, showing signs of occasional promise whilst walking a sometimes scary pub rock knife edge, a little Dury here, a little Knopfler there. It's a friendly knowledgeable crowd as is often the case at 'these things' and a few feather cuts aside we're all of an age and our waist bands just may be a couple of inches wider than the last time we saw Slim Chance.

As Joe Brown once said "A bald Teddy Boy is a sad sight" but some mods, though, are forever mods and as the band gathers on stage there's a well groomed silver haired, bearded geezer up there with them who, despite the passing of time, is most definitely showing some fine mod tendencies as, it turns out, he surely would, being Sid, Ronnie Lanes brother and all.

Beaming with obvious pride Sid calls our attention and before we know it we've slipped into the groove with ease.

The Slim Chance groove really is something unique, and Ronnie knew it. There's an ease that comes from good musicianship but in the same way that, dare I say it, Glenn Miller had a sound in his head and knew what he wanted, so seemingly did Ronnie Lane and it very definitely included a piano accordion although it had to be "played properly" and no one is gonna do that for Slim Chance tonight any better than Charlie Hart beaming, perhaps a little nervously, out from under the brim of his hat.

Somehow it' is just 'there'; it's not nostalgia it's not recapturing lost youth it's a sound, a feel, a groove and its there on stage before our very eyes.



I'm fairly sure that in the hands of another line up it wouldn't be anywhere near as good as this but this IS Slim Chance and they seem happy with the response and even visibly relaxed after a couple of songs as its obvious this is going to be a good night.

Sensibly, no one person is going to 'replace' Ronnie and lead vocals are swapped from song to song but with that important 2nd voice in support lending to the Slim Chance sound.

Alun Davies and Steve Simpson trade the majority of lead vocals, Davies, in particular, veering unnervingly at times close to the 'original' and if Charlie Harts first foray into the vocal spotlight seems a little tentative he soon gets comfortable with his role and eventually bass player Steve Bingham is taking his turn.

The hits keep on coming, even the album tracks, as it's obvious most of us have sung these songs a hundred times and more, mostly with smiles on our faces. One for the Road especially has the massed ranks raising the roof and maybe even lifting the band a little?

As ever with Slim Chance the instrumentation changes constantly as Charlie shares keyboard duties with Geraint Watkins as well as switching between accordion and fiddle, Steve Simpson switching between mandolin, fiddle and guitar but always a rock solid rhythm section of Messrs Bingham and Davey and vocals vocals vocals.



Ronnie himself had said he wrote about specific things but not specifically, providing thumb sketches for the listener to add colour, although his lyrics could at times be quite beautiful, and so, it seems, maybe he wrote for the band as many of the songs clearly have a basis that the band then groove on, not in an extended Little Feat, Grateful Dead way but there's a looseness that invites; although, as I say, I'm certain that in less capable hands it'd be far from this much fun.

How Come arrives unceremoniously and has the audience predictably singing again; The Poacher is as brittle and beautiful as ever although by now Charlie's fiddle isn't working and the Fishpool Philharmonic is reduced to one, albeit a very happy smiling contented one, as Charlie borrows Steve's fiddle and weaves and bobs with pride.

There's a lovely between song exchange as Alun Davies checks his notes and attracts a gentle ribbing from one of the audience responding with a broad smile that, in fairness it's the first time tonight that he's had to and soon enough it's Debris and the crowd are lifted. Ronnie's spirit is in the room for sure and his songs are just as good as they ever were and, yes, this *is* his band and yes, they're doing both him and us proud.

Then its Ooh La La, again, started effortlessly but soon soaring on high and years later the chorus clearly has a certain resonance as we all sing at the top of our voices "I wish that I knew what I know now, when I was younger" and smile and bob and weave and revel in the moment as the song slows and stops and starts again and soars again and then its done.

But of course, it isn't, and Ronnie's brother is up on stage thanking everyone for the love and for remembering his brother and, rightfully, praising the band for brining the music "back to life"; songs that had lain on CDs on shelves not forgotten but occasionally brought out and enjoyed yet tonight they were in their rightful place, out in the open, making feet move and faces smile and voices sing.

The encore we really didn't have to work too hard for was, of course, a couple of choice cover versions, a stomp though Chuckle Berry's 'You Never Can Tell' before closing the evening with 'Goodnight Irene'.

Hand shakes and hugs all round, both on and off stage, and you get the feeling this could be the start of something, not just a nostalgic reminiscing glance backwards. These are wonderful songs and an undoubtedly damned fine band that would tear up any festival audience you put them before. Rupert had mentioned to me beforehand that 'if it all goes well' there are indeed plans afoot and, after tonight I'd guess those plans are now even further afoot.

I for one hope those songs are allowed out regularly in future for others to discover and enjoy.

It was a privilege not to mention a whole heap of fun and thanks are due to everyone involved, not least to Ronnie Lane himself for some great memories and a bright looking future.



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barry@biguntidy.com