

# Godspeed You! Black Emperor



## LIVE REVIEW: THE FALL, TRUDY & THE ROMANCE, BLOOD SPORT @ BOILER SHOP, NEWCASTLE (23.10.17)

MARK CORCORAN-LETTICE WITNESSES AN OCCASIONALLY TROUBLING, BUT NONETHELESS DRAMATIC, SET FROM MARK E SMITH

BY MARK CORCORAN-LETTICE ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25TH, 2017

*Images by Gary Chaytor*

Unpredictability has long been the guiding force behind Mark E Smith and **The Fall**. Alongside the usual litany of clichés a writer is expected to roll out – the line-up changes, the ever-expanding back catalogue, and ‘insert that John Peel quote here’ – it does seem relevant to point out how truly unique an enterprise The Fall are; how Smith and company have consistently refused the comforts of nostalgia in favour of pressing ceaselessly forwards. It’s an artistic fervour matched by their devoted fanbase, still voting with their feet to make it down to the Boiler Shop on a Monday evening.

Sheffield’s **Blood Sport** prove an inspired choice of opener: their mangling of live noise-punk and explicitly techno-derived rhythms and structures, driven by the unrelenting man-machine fervour of Sam Parkin’s drumming, make for a forceful half hour where songs mix in and out of each other as one glorious, elongated groove. With the three members recently deciding to call time on the band, it’ll be sad to see such a distinctive act go – but fascinating to see where they take their ideas next.

**Trudy & the Romance** however prove something more of a throwback: a throwback, in fact, to the halcyon days of...2005. Their tepid, pseudo doo wop indie rock goes beyond pastiche to pure tedium, and as their performance moves onward, the crowd slowly but surely loses all interest. The band might be aiming for the simple melodic joys of fifties and sixties pop, but this is little more than Toploader with a topknot.

2017 has been a difficult year in the land of The Fall. Although they’ve been able to celebrate the release of the suitably pugnacious new album *New Facts Emerge*, the band have been compelled to postpone and cancel a host of appearances (this Boiler Shop engagement was originally scheduled for February) due to Mark E Smith’s ill health. Although it’s a tribute to his formidable drive that he appears tonight, the hip priest is visibly very unwell.



Flanked by long-term lieutenants Pete Greenway, Dave Spurr and Keiron Melling (as well as new keyboardist Mike Clapham and manager/additional vocalist Pamela Vander), instead of his usual prowling, equipment-fiddling presence, Smith is tonight confined to a wheelchair in front of his usual deprived, of many of his usual stage habits, he focuses on his vocals to deliver an especially emphatic, phlegmatic set – a telling one-two punch of *Over Over* and *Fall Sound* early on, a stomping *Fol de Rol*, the perennial delight that is *Blindness*.

To their credit, this long-lasting backing group know well enough to keep their heads down and to kick out the jams, even if it is still strange to see a Fall line-up essentially propping up their leader. *Auto Chip* 2014-16 and *Bury* round off the set in dramatic fashion (Smith now delivering his vocals from back-stage – this, admittedly, being something of a frequent trick of his), while a double-speed encore of *Mr Pharmacist* after the crowd have already begun to disperse is a sharp end to the night.

As much as this performance is a triumph of sheer willpower, it still leaves an uneasy feeling to witness a genuine icon and talent of Smith’s calibre in such ailing condition. Not that the decision to do this gig would have been down to anyone or anything but the iron R.O.D. of M.E.S. – and it’s impossible not to admire the determination – but it’s hard not to wonder quite what the future holds for this most remarkable of institutions. Check the guy’s track record – he is not appreciated.

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