

Coachella 2014: The Knife and Bryan Ferry put on a real show



The Knife perform Friday at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. (Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)

By **AUGUST BROWN**

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Toward the end of the Knife's Friday night set on the Outdoor Stage at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, a couple of shirtless bronzed bros wandered over from across the field, pulled by the siren song of an electronic house-music beat.

They probably expected an outpost of the rave-centric Sahara Tent (where, it seems, most fans are spending their days). From a distance, the Swedish electronica duo's take on their 2006 song "Silent Shout" did sort of sound like it belonged in the heaving maw of the dance tent.

The bros began their species' natural fist-pumping, and crept closer to the stage. When they saw what was happening up there, though, their sweaty brows furrowed. Onstage a dozen dancers and musicians in teal space-togas were dancing to purposefully hokey, choreographed routines full of same-sex makeouts and cat-claw hand gestures.

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Karin Dreijer Andersson, the band's singer, had the sides of her blond head shaved, and sang these lines with an evil alacrity: "In a dream I lost my teeth again / Calling me woman and half man / Yes in a dream all my teeth fell out / A cracked smile and a silent shout."

The bros stopped raving. The rest of the crowd, however, went berserk. These were the Knife's people.

At a festival where even attending seems like a performance -- see all the L.A. fast-fashion chains hawking Coachella outfits; see the throngs Instagramming sets with more furor than the musicians performing -- the Knife showed the power of a real *performance*. That is, making a conceptual plan for how to present yourself onstage, and living up to it with every ounce of your imagination.

While the field was a little more empty than hoped because everyone was claiming space for the soon arriving Outkast reunion, the crowd seemed to recognize the importance and meaningful silliness of what was happening. Here is one of electronic music's best bands, returning to the stage after nearly a decade-long absence. They had a reputation for the Gothic, and the band's new album "Shaking the Habitual" does have creepy undertones of twisting synths and pitch-shifted vocals.

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But the Knife were hilarious. They led their charges on a knuckle-dragging caveman-chant in "One Hit," sneering its hook of "Spend time with my family, like the Corleones." For "Without You My Life Would Be Boring," they turned the song into a Latin-percussion cruise ship conga line that led straight to the pit of hell.

Their set hit a similar emotional note for me as Harmony Korine's "Spring Breakers": astonishing beauty and virtuosity, in service of the absolute basest pleasures. It was incredibly thoughtful about having a dumb good time, and did so with an inventiveness that few acts today could even challenge. Spring break forever.

Earlier in the night, another serious performer put on a regal set that was criminally underattended. Bryan Ferry, he of Roxy Music and a closet full of the finest Savile Row suits, broke out what looked like a paisley number for his Coachella set in the Mojave. He brought along some fine backing singers, a saxophonist and many much younger musicians to bolster what remains the velvetiest voice in vintage rock.

He hovered alone at a keyboard for "In Every Dream Home a Heartache," playing sad organ chords until finally hitting the big line -- "I blew up your body, but you blew my mind," and

the band exploded with enough firepower to drive the image home. "Love is the Drug" was silkier dance music than anything coming from any rave tent all weekend, its disco back beat underpinning a quiet storm of saxophone and harmonies. And "Avalon," off his old band's smooth-rock highlight of the same name, was as wispy and majestic as the desert sunset just an hour before. You kids wanted to see a show? You should have been there.

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