

Review: Bryan Ferry at the National Concert Hall

Eamon Sweeney

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Bryan Ferry

Rock stars thrive on persona and alter ego. Musical history is littered with examples from David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust to Bono's The Fly. In the case of Bryan Ferry, he is so natural that he is even able to transform his awkwardness into a charismatic and compelling stage presence.

Shuffling onstage in a floral smoking jacket, Ferry is ludicrously slim for a 68-year-old.

His band and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra tackle Bob Dylan's 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'. Initially, it all sounds a bit of a mess and a painfully predictable case of a strident rock band drowning out the sound of the orchestra. Mercifully, it is the only duff note of the night.

'Slave to Love' is a slinky throwback to 1985 and sounds spectacular with full orchestral backing. When he is not prowling around the stage, Ferry parks himself behind a keyboard. He successfully pulls off the stylishly crumpled look by wearing an undone bow tie.

Ferry (right) rips through his solo back catalogue with a sprinkling of Roxy Music favourites such as 'Casanova' from the classic *Country Life* album alongside evergreen hits 'Let's Stick Together' and 'Love is the Drug'.

During a stirring version of the Irish song 'Carrickfergus' Ferry perfectly delivers the line, "Cause I'm

drunk today and I'm seldom sober" with devastating conviction.

Bryan Ferry truly is the master of debonair understatement. There are no unnecessary melodramatic gestures, but quick and occasionally jerky moments. When Ferry interrupts the orchestra and tells them to "hang on a second", it is the hilarious hallmark of a master at work. His speaking voice is still a bizarre kind of whisper.

If Róisín Murphy did the ultimate version of 'Slave to Love', then Ferry completely owns 'Jealous Guy' by John Lennon. The performance dazzles through its variety from tender soft rock to an all-out rock 'n' roll soul revue worthy of Primal Scream.

There are a few Bryan Ferrys in the room tonight and they're all fascinating.

His backing singers yelp like dogs during 'Let's Stick Together' and all the reserve of being in the Concert Hall magically evaporates. Ferry pulls a harmonica out of his pocket as the auditorium claps and howls along.

In an age when Bob Dylan and Neil Young perform relentlessly to varying degrees of success, Ferry's less is more approach to touring really is the way to go. Forty years of very different-sounding hits are crammed into 90 minutes, prompting a richly deserved standing ovation. Ferry, his band and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra all play their part in delivering a blinder.

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Eamon Sweeney There is a theory attributed to Chuck Berry that if you want to have a hit in a particular country, state or city, the easiest thing to do is to name a song after the place.

Rock Jake Bugg Olympia, Dublin

Ed Power What a bundle of contradictions Jake Bugg has turned out to be. He has prominent cheek-bones and a pout that wouldn't look out of place on a One Direction Christmas calendar - from his breakthrough two years ago it was clear the Nottingham teen was groomed for stardom.

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