

## Bryan Ferry, Royal Albert Hall, review

The grandeur of the Royal Albert Hall was the perfect venue for Bryan Ferry to showcase forty years of music, says Neil McCormick

★★★★★



Orchestrator of pop: Bryan Ferry Photo: Brian Rasic/REX

By Neil McCormick

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In a sleek, floral smoking jacket, **Bryan Ferry** croons and twirls, raising one arm in a gesture akin to a royal wave while tipping his head in bashful grin, as if gracefully and gratefully acknowledging both the crowd's pleasure and his own. It is a venue and set up that suits him: the auspicious grandeur of the Royal Albert Hall playing host to a 12-piece band of consummate musicians, all decorously attired in dinner jackets and diaphanous dresses, playing music deeply rooted in the past and yet daringly modern in its borderless merging of genres.

Singing Reason Or Rhyme from **2010's Olympia album**, Ferry alighted on a repeated lyrical motif filched from novelist Anthony Powell, by way of 17th Century painter Nicholas Poussin: "Dance to the music of time." Behind him, trombones, trumpets, clarinets and

saxophones weaved in and out of the mesmerising groove set up by a thumping rock drummer and elderly jazz percussionist, as the wild lead guitar of long-haired firebrand Oliver Thompson sent notes scattering over delicate pianos and swimming shimmers of keyboard textures in a giddy, cinematic flush of sound. "I'd like to crack on," Ferry announced politely over the applause. "We've got forty years to cover."

When he dramatically arrived on the pop scene with **Roxy Music** in the early 70s, Ferry was acclaimed as an **art** school futurist, yet solo albums of lovingly reshaped cover versions emphasised his classicist roots (in pop terms, at least). This tour is his most audacious attempt to blend his sophisticated modern dance with his deep roots in jazz, blues and Tin Pan Alley.

The show opened with the eight piece Bryan Ferry Orchestra conjuring up Dixieland versions of Roxy hits from last year's *The Jazz Age* album, riffing cheekily through *The Bogus Man* "as Duke Ellington might have played it". It was cheerful, gimmicky fun but only really made sense when Ferry and four members of his modern rock ensemble arrived onstage to flex some 21st century sonic muscle. What they concocted between them was not, thankfully, jazz rock fusion but something richer and stranger.

One of Ferry's great talents has always been as a kind of orchestrator of pop, conjuring up wide vistas of sound that groove and separate and merge in ways that make it hard to tell what instrument is leading the arrangement. This unusual but highly skilled ensemble give Ferry the colours and tones to remake and remodel all kinds of delightful corners of his back catalogue.

Over two and half hours (with interval), they shifted effortlessly from a mournful mandolin sketch of Irish folk lament *Carickfergus* to a rip roaring charge through Roxy's *Editions Of You*, with the 68-year-old Ferry bent over an electric piano, pounding away like he was just starting out in the clubs of Newcastle. This was, indeed, the music of time.

## The mental benefits of running outweigh the physical



'The reason I run is to keep my sanity in check!'

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