A lot can be achieved at 19 years of age – receiving a nomination for BBC Radio 2’s Young Folk Award, or penning a debut album, for instance. Luke Jackson explains all to Hatti Linnell.

Friday 9 August 2013

Having penned a debut album described as ‘affecting and highly promising’, received a nomination for the BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Award and been scouted by acclaimed singer-songwriter Martyn Joseph, Canterbury-born Luke Jackson has more than a few things to shout about. The Roots folk musician is just 19 years of age, but his journey to establishment has already been a long one. “I started playing the guitar at 10, and I started guitar before singing. My first performance was in my Year 6 leaving assembly, so I think I must’ve been about 11. But then I’ve been gigging ever since, I started off in a little pub down the road from me doing open mic nights and stuff and in Canterbury there are a lot of pubs that do music, so I did a lot of open mic nights when I was younger, and then went onto showcase nights around the London area, because they do a lot of nights like that. I was fortunate enough to get signed under Martyn Joseph’ label and go on tour with him last year and release an album last year as well.”

Jackson’s album More Than Boys was released in August of last year, receiving positive reviews from many. While the album takes a traditional route thematically, as the main songs encompass the transition between childhood and adulthood, Jackson puts a new spin on a much-used subject. Jackson said of it: “The debut album’s pretty much about growing up... and it’s simply because at the time I was in my life, and I always try to write stuff that I can relate to but of course other people can relate to.” The singer-songwriter uses very vivid narrative lyrics which paint mental pictures, which is what makes some of the songs so listenable. So many of the songs are perfectly fitted to the summer weather, with such lyrics as ‘The sky was clear, the world was awake/ and it made me smile to hear the birds singing the sweetest lullaby’ – it’s music that makes you want to relax in the garden with friends and cider.

“His live act is something to experience: his rich vocals are reminiscent of James Blake combined with the remarkably observational lyrics of Ed Sheeran and the pleasant sentimentality of Jack Peñate”
Alternatively, though, the songs can be bittersweet as Jackson reflects on what he misses about being a child. In ‘Bakers Woods’, a song about climbing trees with childhood friends, Jackson writes: ‘So now we’ve grown our separate ways/ None of us know how we spend our days/ Maybe in a job or something along those lines/ But I’d give anything just to climb’. Equally the album has some more serious elements, including one of his best known songs, ‘Last Train’, which is about a soldier whose friend dies in the Second World War, and the heart-wrenching ‘Let It All Out’.

I first came across Luke Jackson on attending one of the York House Concerts. It was a unique yet enjoyable evening of music, with Jackson supporting up-and-coming songstress, Beatie Wolfe. Opening with ‘Run and Hide’, Jackson really blew the whole room away. His live act is something to experience: his rich vocals are reminiscent of James Blake combined with the remarkably observational lyrics of Ed Sheeran and the pleasant sentimentality of Jack Peñate. Jackson told me about his love of playing live, especially with new material: “I really love playing new songs and finding out the reaction. I write songs in my room and if I go play them, either they’ll get a clap or they get a really great reaction. It’s almost the make or break of a song after you play it live, you need the audience to sort of tell you what they think of it. I suppose a song that’s stuck with me the longest is ‘Run and Hide’, I always open up with it and the opening track of the album. I’ve always enjoyed playing that and it’s always a good one to start with, because it sort of calms you down a bit. It’s strange, you find some days when rehearsing, going through the same songs can be so tedious but then when you play the songs live you’ve probably played them hundreds of times but it’s always great fun, and I always try to play about with them a bit and change them about. I have fun with most of my songs when I’m playing them live.”

For me, the songs released since the debut album are even more of a treat. Jackson played us a few of these at the house concert, with my personal favourite being ‘Lucy and her Camera’, a song about being in love with a club photographer. It’s catchy, sweet, and shows a strong difference and development in Jackson’s songwriting which is tangible between the album and newer songs. “I think the topics have changed, the one thing I always try to avoid and never really think about when I write a song is trying to write it in a particular genre because I find if I do that it just doesn’t work and as well I never go out to write a song, I just sit in a room and it sort of happens or grabs me whilst walking down the street like that sort of inspiration thing. I suppose a few of songs on the album have a slightly bluesier feel to them, but I think the main change in stuff is probably the topics and general stories behind the songs.”

Luke Jackson has a busy tour schedule coming up, including shows at Shrewsbury Folk Festival and a gig at Canterbury Festival. He’s not playing around York any time soon, but a gig in Durham scheduled for November would definitely be worth the travel.

One comment

Potero

This song reminds me of my little sis’. (she wasn’t really my little sis, but I looked after her like one) I wasn’t a good enough Christian for her and her family. I didn’t even get to say goodbye. She didn’t
believe me. I still have her letters in a safe box. Don’t know why I can’t bring myself to burn them.

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