

## Live Review: alt-J @ Leeds Arena

As alt-J return to the Leeds Arena touring their mature second record, [Kate Barlow](#) immerses herself in the band's chilled but passionate performance

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[alt-J, Øyafestivalen 2015](#)

★★★★★

"We're thrilled to get to play in Leeds once again, a place where we got to spend 3 years," gushes alt-J frontman Joe Newman after the band have made their way onto the stage of the Leeds Arena. It seems a particularly important city for the band, given that the four original members met here while at university. After two supporting acts and three hours after the arena's doors opened, the audience are certainly happy to see the band begin.

However, alt-J don't leave much room for introducing themselves, rushing instantly into their 'Introduction' from their second album, *This Is All Yours*. With a heavy bass line and pitch-perfect vocals that reverberate around the arena, this chilled out beginning song sets the tone for the rest of the hour and a half set.

Next up is all-consuming love song 'Every Other Freckle', perhaps most noticeable for its slightly disturbing line "Turn you inside out and lick you like a crisp packet". It is here that the lights that famously accompany alt-J's shows really come to the fore, and they certainly made the gig. Each lighting choice was perfectly fitted to the atmosphere of the song: an array of shapes, colours and moving objects take up the number of screens behind the stage, while lights in the foreground make their way across the arena and through the audience, always in perfect time with the beat. 'Bloodflood Pt II's recurring lyric "from the seeeaaa" is replicated by a rippling effect through the standing audience, carrying the lights up through the tiers of seats and to the ceiling.

After a stream of chilled out tunes, the band launch into their biggest and best banger, 'Left Hand Free'. From here on, the band follow with a number of hits from their first album, including 'Matilda', 'Dissolve Me' and 'Tessellate'. However, as well-received as they are, with the audience belting along as best they can, it is the songs from their second that seem to me to work best: the mellow lyrics, chesty vocals and acoustic tones create a relaxed and calmer atmosphere that is interrupted at times by the more upbeat songs of *An Awesome Wave*.

Newman's request for the audience to sing along to 'Matilda' is about as close as the band get to audience participation. Throughout the gig very little is said, except from a few remarks about how nice it was to be back in Leeds. Despite the music being so confident, and none of the band members falter for even a moment, it is perhaps the moments in between songs where the band's timidity emerges. While it would have been nice to hear more from the band, it is nonetheless evident that this brand of chilled-out, electronic, textured indie-rock, which others have tried to imitate in the past few years with only partial success, truly can speak for itself.

After a rendition of 'Fitzpleasure' the band take their leave, only to be called back in by a stomping and

shouting audience. Their encore (which in fact becomes about a quarter of their set) begins with 'Hunger of the Pine'. Miley Cyrus' sample "I'm a female rebel" echoes through the arena, bringing a powerful contrast to Newman's haunting vocals. This seems to encapsulate alt-J's rather unique skill of creating lyrics that make absolutely no sense to average listener but singing them with such passion and beauty that you somehow manage to well up with emotion.

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