Rory Foster pretends to be a proper journalist for a day at Leeds’ biggest one day music festival

Monday 13 May 2013

Live at Leeds is, unlike YO1, a festival within the city itself. The doors are thrown open to hundreds of bands over fifteen stages scattered all over the city. Akin to a much smaller South By South West, it’s a fairly big deal for those bands trying to pick up a bit of steam and a few extra fans before the Summer festival circuit plonks them on challenging 2pm slots all around the country. Still, the bands come in all shapes and sizes, and the many Leeds bands get a chance to feel the warmth of home advantage whilst surrounded by big hitters such as The Walkmen, Everything Everything and Darwin Deez.

Due to an onslaught of emails to the organisers, I was honoured to receive a press pass for the day. It was rather fun to finally be at the receiving end of a wristband which before I’ve eyed enviously attached to other people’s wrists. Plus it actually had more than just cosmetic value, providing a queue jump into most of the individual venues at busy times. Despite this fast pass, the fact that I didn’t actually pay to be there made it dangerously easy to be lazy.

With the obvious impossibility of covering even a quarter of the music on offer, it quickly became much more appealing to absorb the vibes that had filled Leeds with music from the safety of the student union bar, which quickly became our base of operations for the day due to 2 quid pints and its relative proximity to many of the key venues. It seemed to be pretty popular with the bands too; King Krule and Fawn Spots both popped by in the afternoon to enjoy the somewhat gritty beer terrace under a very grey sky.

“Here at live at leeds me and king krule having pints and great times #humid

— Rory Foster (@Foster_uk) May 4, 2013
With great power comes great responsibility, and so rather than merely listen to bands soundchecking on a bench all day I felt a moral obligation to at least see someone before 3pm. Kicking off our afternoon with Swimming Lessons was a wonderful ease in to pretending to be a proper music journo; but bubbly synths and deep vocals made for a rather gentle sound that was a pleasant if slightly underwhelming listen. Soon after one more union bar pint it was time to do more important journo stuff, and I headed off to the Leeds met to meet West Coast indie pop band Electric Guest. I had several days before lined up a few interviews around the city in an to attempt to return to York with more than just a hangover, and so this kept me moving about to the extent that I had to spend most of YO1 festival sitting down.

Making it to the Met, I was located and urged backstage by the label people like some sort of drug dealer, waiting with some of the other interviewers much less excited to be there than me. When time came to speak to the band I could hear some sort of chanting coming from the other side. Somewhat concerned I was walking into a séance, they were in fact repeatedly chanting my name, probably to provide the band with some excitement before being asked the same questions: how’s the gigging, how’s the album, how was working with Danger Mouse. The latter was met with a particularly potent grimace, only to quickly recover into a lovely smile to enter into interview-mode:

So, how did Danger Mouse get involved with your new album?
Asa Taccone (lead singer, songwriter): Years ago when I was in college I’d call my bro in LA and play him demos, whatever I’d been working on. This was around the time Danger Mouse was pretty unknown, before Gnarls Berkley, The Grey Album, all that stuff. He put danger mouse on phone and sent more stuff…. Over the years he gave advice, playlists to inspire, and when I moved to LA he just paid for my whole life for a while... he was the reason I was able to make music for a year and a half.

The album’s written by you, but how did you meet the band?
A: For a while I lived in a big communal house with loads of artists and musicians in LA, back then I was into hip hop, and had never done live drums... I wanted 4 people who actually got on... we played for a year, took our time, but we’re still working out the live thing. Doom used to come over to the house that we first recorded in, saw him without his mask, looks exactly like a black Homer Simpson... if you can imagine what a human, African American Homer Simpson looks like. The LA scene deffo in the last year feels like what Brooklyn does... it’s massive now.

The album (their debut, Mondo)’s just being re-released in the UK. How long ago was it actually put together?
A: It’s been out in the US since April 2012, but it never really got pushed in the UK. Some of it was written quite recently, some of it’s eight years old.

To me it sounds like a more emotionally variable Broken Bells album.
A: Well the album uses all the same drums, same bases, so sounds like [Danger Mouse’s other records] in that respect. I was worried that it was too variable, but DM told me not to worry, there’ll be a cohesiveness... it helped us engineering through the same board.
Honestly I think Bryan (Danger Mouse)is influenced by our stuff!! Broken Bells’ second LP is swinging for
the fence in terms of pop. I have a fucking theory that every indie artist I know has this little itch to do pop music... they all actually want to do Beyonce covers.

**What's the reception been like in the UK so far?**
Matthew Compton(Drummer): Awesome. Like in Bristol, it was small but everyone there was super in to it, that's the key really.

**What's after this?**
M: A few summer festivals, relax.

**What are you listening to at the moment?**
A: I quite this band Bondax: two kids do kind of, chilled, 90s, house, semi-gay, dance music. I've done vocals for a track (of theirs).

Calming down post-interview with an expensive drink over at the Faversham (only making me miss the Union bar more), a lively Jetta – the Liverpool based singer songwriter – got the crowd jumping. Glad to catch some movement relatively early into the day, I was in fact only there because I had managed to arrange an interview with John Newman, the Rudimental soul singer. A lovely man whose mum ambushed the interview at several points, he was so keen to be interviewed he answered his tour manager’s phone while he was asleep to come find me: pop star dedication.

After more journalistic attempts that were squandered due to how long it takes to traverse Leeds, it was eventually time for Savages on at the Leeds Uni Stylus stage. The band were very angry and loud but in a good way, however the lead guitarist looked really angry in a bit of a bad way (like she might kill someone/the sound guy). Luckily she didn’t and then it was time for another uni bar drink.

Jetta turned this quiet pub into an electro circus.

This was the point where there were some tricky decisions to make lineup-wise. Walkmen, or Darwin Deez? Dutch Unkles or Pins? Darwin Deez or Walkmen? Walkmen, or Everything Everything? My cooler companion’s plea to see The Walkmen was unfortunately underpinned by my considerable tipsiness and my uncontrollable love for the pop mania of Darwin Deez. However a relatively clever staggering made that many of these weren’t quite as mututally exclusive as they might have been, and while he stomped off to cooler climates, I caught a good twenty minutes of Darwin Deez putting on a good show to a lifeless crowd. After quickly hotstepping from the met to the union stages, a half an hour of Everything Everything went down a huge storm with both my legs and the wider audience. The band has slid rather comfortably into the middle-sized indie band shoes that bands like Bloc Party and the Maccabees wore so well not that long ago, and it's good to see them there.
No one was enjoying Darwin Deez as much as I was, which was very upsetting.

Clearly the press wristband is one that corrupts rather than actively encourages sound coverage of an event. Live at Leeds was a behemoth that everyone will approach in different ways and leave with different memories, perhaps to a greater extent than even the most variable of summer festivals. It can be enjoyed both as a celebration of and a reminder that Leeds offers an incredible range of venues, bands and genres, and despite spending a whole day living it up in Leeds I feel unworthy of fully rating the event as a whole; there was just so much and so little time to see it all. I can however review the union bar, which I am pleased to say was very good; but don’t go there expecting to see King Krule again any time soon.

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