

REVIEW – Newton Faulkner at The Usher Hall



There's only so much you can do with a guitar, but that doesn't apply to Newton Faulkner. The acoustic architect didn't even break a sweat as he played to a healthy Edinburgh crowd. Alongside the impeccable technique that Faulkner holds as a talented musician, he proves that men can indeed multitask.

You don't realise how sensational Faulkner is as a guitarist when listening to studio recordings; it appears natural upon witnessing him live. The way he plays guitar is unique – hand all over the fretboard as he tunes mid-song with his musical ear while performing some Eddie Van Halen-esque fingertapping. He is essentially a one-man band most of the times when a few of his touring members – whom provide backing vocals, additional guitar and cello – aren't on stage. Faulkner performs percussion on both feet of which are coordinated by a stripey sock and a spotty sock. This accompanies his beautiful guitar playing and harmonious vocals.

Faulkner tried to vary the set with as much from his four albums as possible. Most of the material derived from his most recent album, *Studio Zoo*, with his most popular album, *Hand Built by Robots*, only spawning two songs, including fan favourite, 'Dream Catch Me'.

The dreadlocked master began his set with 'Where to Start' which hinted a tame audience. The crowd slowly got into it as some outspoken fans howled preposterous requests at Faulkner. Some of the songs he said he wouldn't dream of playing again and would keep to his house gig days. The only glimmer of hope for a request was when Faulkner messed about with Justin

Timberlake's 'Señorita'. However we only got a brief glimpse of the riff and some high-pitched vocals. Newton warmed the crowd up with a tantalising cover of Massive Attack's 'Teardrop' which upped the ante and made the crowd more rhapsodic, so to speak. There was more movement, not as much as predicted but Faulkner made sure he would see the Edinburgh crowd jump at least once claiming that "just because it's an acoustic gig, it doesn't mean you can't jump." The last song of the main set saw the only spring action of the gig as the crowd continued to remain collected yet effectively loud.

Faulkner's crowd interaction and charisma is to be admired. He entertained the audience with some tuning humour, comments swinging back and forth from the conversational crowd, and introducing his drink for the show to the crowd: a teapot, which someone nearby predicted that it wasn't filled with actual tea.

Some artists will come on stage for a 100-minute set, say very little and go off stage again, but it's obvious that Faulkner really cares for his fans – it is evident in his performance which comes off as perfectly soulful.