

REVIEW – Passenger at Usher Hall



Photo by Valentina Peruzzo

What is a folk gig? Not a Passenger gig. He can boast all he wants, but in the end it is a pop gig with all the musical clichés in the world attached to it.

First song and he's already making us "miserable" – that's how he put it – and the next he's trying to lighten the mood. It's something that Passenger has learned while performing solo shows, and that is livening up the crowd.

Admirably he slots in his smash hit 'Let Her Go' halfway through the set and doesn't wait until the rear end of the gig so that people don't leave early. Thankfully nobody left as the singer-songwriter was constantly on top of things.

He may appear as a bashful, fragile type of guy, but his interaction with the crowd lifted spirits even higher. Usually audiences are not ready for artists blabbing on about what they get up to and what each song is about, but Passenger's stories before some of his songs made a real connection with every crowd member in Edinburgh's most prestigious venue.

But while Passenger's impeccable performing and wonderful stage presence wowed the crowd, the continuous milking of the conclusions of songs in an acoustic KISS fashion grew a bit more tedious as the 80-minute show progressed. Well, it could have been less than 80 minutes if it wasn't for his clichéd finished-but-not-finished "This is the last song," but then coming on for three more.

The decision to not bring his band out on tour was an odd one. It's an easy transition for an artist whose music is solely

acoustic anyway. The added strings and percussion is just layered texture to the songs – basically so that the albums don't dry up half way through. Shame that approach isn't loaded into his live sets.

One song is fingerpicked, the next is strummed, both in varying scales; one is about his messy relationship, the next is about being 27 and doing this, that and the next thing. All the banal stunts and formulaic music grew more and more anaemic as the show progressed.

Luckily the saving grace was his performance!