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MUSIC

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Cocoa Review: Raul Midon @ Ronnie Scotts

By admin · On May 2, 2016



A few years back a friend sent me a YouTube link of a guy playing in New York, wearing shades and a flat cap, who was singing while slapping an acoustic guitar in a really percussive style.

Instagram feed



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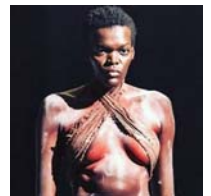
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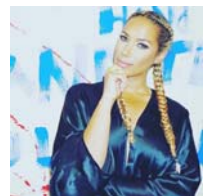
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Roll forward a couple of years and I stumble across the name **Raul Midon** on iTunes and purchase a couple of live tracks, which have stayed firmly on the playlist since, simply because they don't sound like anything else.

Mr Midon then popped up briefly at the end of a fascinating documentary, **Still Bill**, about the famous singer songwriter **Bill Withers** who now stays away from the limelight. They record together, as I find out recently at an intimate solo show in Soho at **Ronnie Scott's**.

In fact his show is packed full of anecdotes and jokes, about working with **Stevie Wonder**, legendary producer, his blindness, and the various album projects he's been working on. However, had he not said a word the music would undoubtedly have spoken for itself.

Although clearly delighted to be playing at the iconic jazz venue, a sold out crowd are left in awe at the virtuosity on display, in what turns out to be a mesmerising one man show.

Visibly taking a deep breath before each song, Midon appears to shake with the initial intensity and dexterity required to produce the percussive funk flowing through his hands, before interludes of Spanish and classical stylings tumble down his fingers at a breathtaking pace. Even more impressive is that it all works. It does so because of the sheer musicality of the man born in New Mexico.

It's a performance during which pessimism and cynicism are spirited away, making you believe in all of the possibility expressed simply in his words, with songs about him imagining sight, sunshine, unrequited love and daydreaming while listening to the rain.

While his innate technical skill has to be seen to be believed – at one point he is singing soulfully, using his mouth to replicate a trumpet, but also playing guitar with one hand and drums with another – I found myself closing my eyes, because to be in Midon's musical multiverse is to hear and feel the music in the most immersive of ways.

Instinctual and inspirational, I found myself shaking my head in slight disbelief at times at the level of musicianship. He was clearly enjoying himself, continuing to share jokes with the audience – this time about perceptions of his genius, the time he played at the Ministry of Sound club at 5am, and how his wife asks him to put out the trash while he's practising.

He even has time for forays into reggae, spoken word and solo piano and voice, the latter he says he has limited knowledge of. It's still very moving and completely compelling. We also learn that he's writing an instrumental guitar album, which may lose him his audience, another self deprecating joke shared with a packed house.

He harmonises with both his voice and instruments, plays intricate runs of incredible speed, jazz chords, majors, minors, flat 5ths, 13ths and everything in between. He evokes the sunshine, the moonlight, the childlike and the complex, but is a vessel for rhythms, melodies and the sheer joy of creating musical sound.

To be in the same room while he's playing is something special to experience, in fact, in the words of Raul Midon's most famous song "it's all a state of mind".

- BILL WITHERS
- MINISTRY OF SOUND
- RAUL MIDO
- RONNIE SCOTTS
- STEVIE WONDER
- STILL BILL

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