

chords and a moody guitar melody line. Really nice playing that left me wanting to listen to more of his stuff.

That just left the main man and what a stunning performance he gave. It occurs to me, now I think about it, that his wonderfully clean and precise playing with its sharp attack on the strings and the ability to wring a melodic sound out of any part of a song's chord structure, even when he's bashing away like a man possessed, represents a beautiful marriage of the styles of Hank Marvin and Jeff Beck (with a soupçon of Jimi)! The 'Chubbafatha Medley' showcased everything you need to know about this brilliant player, blending the theme from *The Godfather* with 'Miserlou' in an extended combination that was both melodic and punky. The performance of this number sparked a mini-invasion of the front of stage area by some very attractive students who were dancing with a sense of enjoyment seldom seen at a blues gig. Popa segued straight into a pumping version of 'What'd I Say' in order to keep the dancing going. Every song featured some really excellent playing, whether it was new numbers from his forthcoming album, like 'I'm the Beast From The East', 'Let Love Free The Day' and its title track, 'It's a Mighty Hard Road', or standards from his live set like 'Hey Joe' and 'Sympathy For The Devil', the latter closing an amazing set which received a rapturous response from the capacity audience. Simply sensational.

Image and words Simon Green

Brave Rival

Echo Hotel Music Club, Hook

18.1.2020

I'd heard great things about Brave Rival (who supported Stevie Nimmo here last year) so was looking forward to tonight, as were a near capacity audience at this excellent venue.

The band (Lindsey Bonnick vocals, Chloe Dixon vocals, Ed Clark guitar, Billy "Danger" Dedman bass, and Donna Peters drums) have only been together since August 2019: this was their first headlining gig. What better opportunity than this to record a live album?

They hit the stage with a mixture of soul, rock and blues: Lindsey and Chloe letting their voices ring out above the powerhouse of Donna and Billy (both ex-Albany Down) while Ed proved his skills as a lead guitarist without overdoing things.

Lindsey, with her long flowing red hair and retro outfit (including flared denim) was poetry in motion with a really lovely, powerful yet

warm voice: perfect for those slow love ballads. Chloe's voice had the same power and warmth with a slightly more raw edge when required: combine that with her sassy stage persona and you had the perfect rock chick. Together they provided a great mix of style and harmony, while their moves and grooves gave the band its huge stage presence.

They played a mixture of originals and some classic covers perfectly suited to the band. After the opening upbeat numbers, they slowed things right down for the opening of 'Without You': just the girls singing cleanly and softly with some very delicate playing from Ed, then opening up to something completely different with the introduction of the backline. The girls harmonies flowed over the top, with Ed providing some really great rock licks. Next, a song originally made famous by the Box Tops in 1967: this version was very different with a much fuller sound, but easily identifiable as 'The Letter', a real classic. Moving seamlessly from soulful ballads to bluesy rock they gave us a full set of excellent music.

'Come Down' was the perfect example of this: powerful soaring vocals with some spine-tingling contralto from Chloe, and Ed's blistering fretwork had the audience on their feet cheering and applauding. 'Sweet Addictive High' allowed the band to let loose and rock out with Billy providing some excellent high-end bass work and Ed really showing his mettle. The girls' voices, reminiscent of a combination of Aretha Franklin, Etta James and Bonnie Raitt, made 'Love Me Like A Man' extremely memorable.

By now there were audience members up and dancing and we were treated to a lengthy jam with improvised lyrics, and solos from the instrumentalists: Donna producing a really meaty drum solo while Billy gave a shorter, but dextrous bass solo. They finished with 'Long Time Coming', opening delicately with Lindsey on vocals and Ed gently picking in the background, before Chloe and the band joined in for the chorus: a band original, but with a very familiar melody, perhaps I've heard it on YouTube! I'll certainly be happy to hear it again as it deserves to be a classic ballad in years to come. Following a full standing ovation they encored with 'Magpie': with a southern rock vibe, grungy slide guitar riff and catchy chorus it ended the gig on a high.

Was it a good gig? It was, in fact, more than good. It was absolutely superb, full of energy.

Image and words Graham Hutton

