

Review

THE ONION CLUB at Hospitalfield

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Trevor Ward

The word “eclectic” doesn’t really do The Onion Club justice. Anyone can throw together a set list so diverse it encompasses ballads, blues, torch songs and pop, but presentation is everything.

The Onion Club – singer/songwriter Pauline M Hynd (aka Dubiety Brown) and pianist/composer Stephen Lee – transformed the genteel surroundings of Arbroath’s Hospitalfield House into the murky, dimly-lit environs of a Weimar-era cellar with the ghost of Bertolt Brecht plotting dark deeds in the shadows. Or was it the gingham-tinged conviviality of Hemingway’s favourite Parisian bistro with the strains of Edith Piaf wafting in between the cigarette smoke?

No, the word is “electric”.

Whether it’s Pauline singing “Song of the Siren” while playing the accordion – could an instrument as mournful and melancholy be any more suited to This Mortal Coil’s lament? – or their Nico-inspired arrangement of Jackson Browne’s “These Days” – a song I’d never heard before but was like an arrow straight to the heart – there was a spine-tingling current in the air.

I’d been wary of the pre-gig hype. But whether it was Rodgers and Hart’s “My Funny Valentine” or Brecht and Weill’s “Alabama Song”, all were handled as the cultural treasures, the musical artifacts, they are. (Add to that a gripping version of Nick Cave’s “God Is In The House”.) They were ravished rather than ruined.

The Onion Club’s own compositions were no less enthralling, notably “Manky Water” which sounded as if it has been recently dredged from a Louisiana bayou.

Yes, the word is definitely “electric”.....