

David McAlmont

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The Lowry

The Christians reviewed by Jane Turner

Reviewed by Dave Porter

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David McAlmont has come a long way since his early collaboration with ex-Suede guitarist Bernard Butler and their success in the charts.

David has a lot to thank social networking for. Within days of setting up a Facebook account, acclaimed composer Michael Nyman sent a friend request suggesting they work together on a musical collaboration.

An acclaimed solo album and work with esteemed composer Michael Nyman, as well as a residency at Ronnie Scott's, proves the versatility of someone many consider to have Britain's finest soul voice.

Such is the devotion of his online fans that his latest tour is the result of pressure from them for him to perform live again. In fact, McAlmont has an engagingly warm relationship with his fans, playing in their living room on more than one occasion.

So we have the power of social networking to thank for his appearance in Manchester in the fittingly intimate setting of the Lowry's Quays theatre. Backed by a band and long-time collaborator Guy Davies, McAlmont arrives on stage garlanded in an impressive feather boa, festooned with jewels and a baroque face mask. No drama queen then.

But such affectation belies a voice that's thrillingly powerful like his idol, Shirley Bassey, whose Diamonds Are Forever he covers, he has a cavernous voice capable of pinning you down.

It's evident when he reassuringly delivers a resoundingly plangent Yes, recalling the glory days of McAlmont and Butler he tells the audience he would rather leave in the past. If it means less to him than it does to us, we're glad for such indulgences.

Love and its dark entanglements are what McAlmont mulls over best, his plaintive voice mourning the passing of yet another relationship. But I should tread carefully here: one critic is castigated for writing of one his songs that it was obviously about a homosexual relationship. But, McAlmont delights in telling us, it was in fact written about a straight friend's girlfriend troubles. So love is universal after all.

At one point, he steps down from the stage for what he jokingly warns will be a bit of audience participation. What transpires is an aching delivered song backed only by a double bass and for those lucky enough to be in the aisles next to him an unexpectedly personal encounter with one of music's more colourful and even more talented performers.