

## THROWING MUSES LONDON CLAPHAM GRAND

ARROGANCE, PURE arrogance. Who'd have thought the Throwing Muses would have the audacity, the nerve, the sheer bloody-minded sense of self-importance to impose themselves on us for *two-and-a-half-hours*? This is beyond a joke, beyond the vague timidity and wayward outbursts of old, beyond even the transcendental sprawl of a Spiritualized set. As the evening goes on and on, we're into epic, Guns N' Roses territory here.

So, is 'Pearl' pumped into a 'November Rain'-size slumber-along? Hardly. Is Kristin Hersh wearing a kilt, pretending her guitar sidekick hasn't done a runner and conspicuously losing her grip? Perhaps not. *Getting a grip* would be more accurate. It's endemic of the revitalised Muses' confidence that they have enough faith in the devotion of their audience and — more importantly for us — the strength of their songs to try getting away with this heroic, end-of-tour indulgence.

They do get away with it, of course, as only few bands could. There are thunderous versions of

'Red Heaven' songs, five new ones, half an hour of Kristin solo, stark and stunning, and countless updates on old glories, where the thrill of seeing a totally unpredictable band with emotional chaos at its core has been replaced by more controlled, but no less affecting, fear and frenzy.

Everything's sharper now, with the band's switch to a power trio dynamic bringing a harder, more rigorous and — as Kristin would have it — a more *masculine* sound. So the axis has shifted live, from the wandering, elliptical guitar and vocal duels between Tanya and Kristin of old, to a channelled aggression focused on David Narcizo's virtuoso drumming (only Sugar's Malcolm Travis comes close this year). 'Furious', 'Take' and 'Say Goodbye' are all ferocious slabs of mean, measured rock, and only 'The Devil's Roof' really suffers from the hardening of its arteries. 'Hate My Way' is still heartbreaking, a study of mental fragility that can resonate and move even in the confident new mind-set and band set-up of Kristin and the Muses, while 'Mania' is still rampantly uninged — and relishing it.

There's clearly an element of emotional catharsis when she plays these songs that hasn't been

shaken off — especially the wonderful acoustic teen fragment, 'The Letter' — but it's balanced by a bolder musical attitude; the demons have been harnessed, if you like . . .

. . . Even if a few gremlins are still on the loose, smudging the sound for the first few songs. Nevertheless, they can't ruin the way Kristin croons through 'Delicate Cutters' . . . or the pristine elegance of 'Two Step' . . . the sprung vivacity of 'Fire Piles' . . . the hammeringly intense 'Bea . . . 'Pearl' stretching out *just far enough* into a show-stopping summation of old mood-swings and new discipline . . . and on and on until time ends, the back catalogue's exhausted and duty calls to go check on the baby . . . A great night, as if you hadn't guessed.

**John Mulvey**

## THE BARDOTS OXFORD POLYTECHNIC

"THIS IS called 'Obscenity Thing'," announces Serge Gainsbourg in a rather fetching Harrington jacket, "and it's about REALLY FILTHY SEX!!!". Wahey!!! Hold onto your haircuts, pop pickers, it's time for some red hot pumping porno