



**Black Francis: sheer, brazen, nonchalant genius**

# HE'S THE BOSSA

## BLACK FRANCIS

### LONDON BORDERLINE

THE PROSPECT of a Black Francis solo show seemed quite daunting in view of the Pixies' recent London shows cruising on auto-pilot with fleeting moments of genius. But the reality – even considering this was essentially a money-raising gesture – was simply beyond belief; a dark and soulful excursion into the unknown with grotesque imagery galore. Armed with an electric guitar and precious little else, Black Francis stripped familiar Pixies songs to the bone to reveal a beating heart of steel.

He's an inspired and consummate performer, with a nice line in pertinent asides. And the songs made such sense in this context you almost couldn't imagine them done any other way – a sure mark of greatness. In fact, it's a pity tonight was just a diversion; a stop-gap on the Pixies' journey to global domination, as he could've been a singer/songwriter with a difference (from Hades perhaps).

Naturally, you immediately latch on to the voice. Like a whiney American at worst, or, for the most part, like the pealing of trumpets crossed with something ancient and dangerous. There's the trademark scream not far removed from scraping fingernails on a blackboard and the equally famous falsetto (usually mistaken for Kim Deal's tones on record). Align these multiple voices with the barest of guitar chords and you've got a strangely fulfilling experience.

Black Francis uses everyday jargon and arcane words like 'prithree' to get inside your head. And once he does, the tiny, nagging inner-voice just won't leave. As his favourite subjects are death, mutilation, weirdness, alienation and sci-fi you don't exactly get that drippy Suzanne Vega effect. His male and female sides seem locked in an eternal struggle with results like 'The Happening', one of the few truly amazing tunes on the patchy recent LP (he almost admitted this by concentrating on 'Doolittle' and 'Surfer Rosa').

When he howls "*You're the son of incestuous union*" or sings "*Bloody your hands on a cactus tree / Wipe it on your dress and send it to me*" you know you're dealing with a twisted mind trying to appear normal as opposed to vice-versa. And when he hijacks what was once a Kim Deal song, 'Into The White' and it all seems so natural, you know you're dealing with sheer, brazen, nonchalant genius.

Dele Fadele