



Is it Kurt (ains) for Ralske?

SCENE BUT NOT HEARD

ULTRA VIVID SCENE

LONDON CHARING CROSS BORDERLINE

IT SHOULD be awesome. Absolutely. We fully expect the Ultra Vivid Scene live experience to be a passion party, an event of such precious majesty it will turn all would-be perfect pop contemporaries into hapless frogs and forever abolish them into amphibian oblivion. Kurt Ralske's combo's first-ever British appearances, tonight is the third of three showcases at the preposterous Borderline, and for sure the initial signs are encouraging: the pavement is bristling with unlucky ticketless sorts, while inside the atmosphere is reverentially expectant. It's been a damn long time.

Alas, great expectations rarely guarantee exemplary experiences. Ultra Vivid Scene are being pranged by a sound roughly as sympathetic as Henry VIII was to his marital companions. Throw in a chatterbox crowd more intent upon ligging than pigging out on UVS, add the perennial problem of the inability to decently reproduce vinyl perfection on stage, and the initial promise evolves into a decidedly uncherishable reality.

Stripped of studio synthetics, Ultra Vivid Scene's scenery is infinitely rougher and less attractive than the albums' imagery suggests. Collin Rae's guitar dominates proceedings to a disturbing extent, callously crushing Ralske's vocals – hardly a difficult task, admittedly, as the

blond be-shaded one's winsome somnambulance makes Harriet Sunday appear positively rabid.

The end result is a kind of Lilac Time discovering the delights of sonic mayhem. Flashes of perfect pop fragmented with malicious feedback. The vague colliding with the vicious. A sound which, incapable of deciding whether to turn down or rock out, settles for an all-too-often messily unspectacular middle ground.

There are moments when this self-inflicted, self-obsessive indecision pays delicious dividends: in 'Guilty Pleasure' Ralske whispers, *"She never walks the streets in daylight / She never walks the streets at night"* over phased jangles and loping effective rhythmic excursions: 'Staring At The Sun' languishes on a bed of thorny sweetness, as cool and undemanding as the show threatened to be; and when chopped Noo Wave frets dramatically converge into untarnished liquid spectrum flows, forgiveness is imminent.

But ultimately, after a 40-odd minute set sealed, not to mention scuppered, by a genuinely wrecked roll through 'The Mercy Seat', Ralske's schemes fail to fascinate: this isn't beautiful, brain-melting or challengingly belligerent – it isn't shockingly anything. Tonight, Ultra Vivid Scene are dragged down from the stars to the dusty, unfriendly bar-room floor. And it doesn't befit them at all. Dream on.

Simon Williams