
Plush, live

Friday, September 5, 2008 at 6:13am

The thing about liking Plush is that people who like Plush find it hard to accept, on some dreamy level, that actually not everyone else in the world likes Plush (or would, if only they were to hear some). Plush fans know Liam Hayes isn't really Burt Bacharach or Carole King, and yet – knowing that, we also choose not to know it, and hear and see him through filters as dusty-warm as the light through the window on the cover of *Tapestry*. We expect his rare gigs to be sold out. We are surprised he is on second, not headlining. We see him in split-screen: one half the awkward man with a shock of dark hair and sharp canine features on a small stage in a full-ish venue; the other half, a super-8 montage, retro furnishings all present and correct and horns blaring to heaven. Looks a little like this, maybe:

That's a video for a new Plush single, and even I can see how – really – bizarre it is, despite loving the bit with the bike and the bit with the dog and the bit where he looks like Dory Previn etc etc. Even I can see that as I type something right here about how Hayes is so focussed, so much himself, that he transcends his sources and creates his own world, others will just see retrogressive pleasantries. I think that's part of liking Plush.

I've always enjoyed the tensions inherent in Plush's music, which seem to me to be between the hazy, lush perfection Hayes aims for in his sound, and the awkwardness of his own presence within that; between the full-to-bursting arrangements and lonely voice; and between fantasy and reality – lyrically, he'll follow classic songwriterly patterns and use a pretty non-specific vocabulary, then throw in something so obviously personal it floors you for a second.

When Hayes plays live, as he did a few nights ago in London, this tension is embodied almost literally in his brittle, nervous stage presence, and his choice of accompaniment – an electric guitar (interestingly – although I know this, having seen him before, nothing semi-acoustic, hollow-bodied, singer-songwriterish, just a Fender), which allows the tough sinews of his songs to be exposed, leaves pauses for you to fill out imaginatively. Hayes plays harder and more rhythmic than you expect, emphasising his songs' ability to stand up without the frills of arrangement, but the idea of arrangement hovers around them all the time nonetheless, and you find your memory painting in washes of strings and brass, even on the songs you don't recognise.

The song in the video above was the last one in his set, and my favourite bit was the line "Is it getting clearer?", which kind of hangs out at the end of the chorus in a really nice way.

Here's the remaining Plush/Autumn Defense tour dates:

Fri 5th Sep 2008 The Cluny Newcastle

Sun 7th Sep 2008 Clwb Ifor Bach Cardiff

Mon 8th Sep 2008 Brudenell Social Club Leeds

Tue 9th Sep 2008 Night & Day Manchester