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FM / ROMEO'S DAUGHTER Academy 2, Birmingham – 23rd May

An incredibly busy spring gig guide has resulted in many clashes and some really hard choices to make, but thankfully the first leg of FM's first tour since their comeback at least left a do-able Sunday trip to Birmingham. The late addition of Romeo's Daughter as the support act made it an even more attractive proposition, so after meeting up with friends in Birmingham town centre for those all important ice-cold beverages (gotta keep those fluids up on these scorching sunny days!), the previously unknown venue turns out to be virtually next door to the hotel we stayed at for the Z-Rock 2008 show.



The Academy 2 is small but classy and the turn-out is particularly good, in fact there isn't much space at all as Romeo's Daughter take to the stage to considerable applause. With a perfect sound from the off the familiar strains of 'Heaven In The Back Seat' gets people dancing, but as there's a full RD review in below I'll just say that the band played perfectly, Leigh Matty sang as well as I've ever heard her and the crowd loved them. The short set seemed to be over almost as soon as it started and they also played 'Velvet Tongue', 'Attracted To The Animal', the ballad 'Stay With Me Tonight' and a lively finish of 'I Cry Myself To Sleep', 'Wild Child' and 'Don't Break My Heart'.

This tour has been a long time coming for the rejuvenated FM, but now with an excellent new album under their belts things are beginning to happen. The set tonight isn't really much different from the album launch party, kicking off with the expected 'Wildside' from 'Metropolis' before a flurry of older crowd favourites. The band themselves were grinning from ear to ear as the crowd cheered every intro and sang every chorus to 'Face To Face', 'That Girl', 'Don't Stop' and 'Only The Strong Survive'. Like Romeo's Daughter before them the sound is good right from the beginning with ample room between Pete Jupp and Merv Goldsworthy's booming rhythm, Jem Davis' sparse keyboard fills and the guitars of Steve Overland and new boy Jim Kirkpatrick for Overland to soulfully wring every ounce of emotion from every line.

After a raunchy 'Blood & Gasoline' the new album gets an extended airing with the current single 'Hollow', 'Over You' and the brilliant 'Flamingo Road' all running smoothly, even though Kirkpatrick had to have two stabs at the 'Metropolis' guitar into due to an equipment glitch. For me 'Hard Day In Hell' is a bit of a lull in proceedings and the Gents is full of guys who obviously feel the same, but after the high that accompanies 'All Or Nothing' and 'Burning My Heart Down', their set-closing cover of 'Heard It Through The Grapevine' seems to divide opinion with many wishing it was replaced by one of their own songs, even though it's the perfect vehicle for Steve Overland's soulful voice.

However, the three song encore was just superb with a classy 'Frozen Heart', punchy 'Bad Luck' and the very welcome return of the stadium rock classic 'American Girls' sending the assembled partisan crowd into raptures. The band take their bow and Pete Jupp ends a great evening by coming to the microphone and leaving a heartfelt message in tribute to the sadly departed Ronnie James Dio.

Phil Ashcroft