JOHN (TIMESTWO) – Live at The Castle Hotel, 04/10/2019

For any out of the loop, to Google the band JOHN, would be taxing; however, in the loop you know to type (TIMES TWO) into the search engine. That’s right! Two lads from Crystal Palace near London both aptly named John. John Newton (vocals/drums) and Johnny Healey (Guitar) are capable of creating the sheer sonic brilliance witnessed in an intimate northern quarter pub “The Castle Hotel” on a Friday night. As recently there has been a lot of amazing two pieces, and with the whole explosion of indie bands coming out of the woodwork, this band JOHN are worthy of amazing feats. Describing themselves as “Four Arms, Four Legs, Two Heads, Wood, Metal, Plastic” could be a summary of a band taking the simple things in life and stretching them to such phenomenal extremes.

With JOHNs return to Manchester has been anticipated with this gig being sold out over a Month and A half ago, With JOHNs second record “Out Here on the Fringes” being released the same day. So, after 12 hours of absorbing this (including the two singles gaining radio play with radio 1 rock show in the run up to release day) These songs live was nothing short of brilliant.

After a lovely and neatly wrapped opening from enthusiastic Drums and Bass duo (by no means Drum’n’Bass) “Slap Rash”, and a charming display of indie shining from “Slow Hand Clap” we are brought to the main event. Excitement already building after two great warm up acts, and a pre-gig Q and A at 33 Oldham Street, JOHN are already to go. With a people from JOHN supporting “Mcluskey\*” peaking over at the stage in anticipation…

No count in, no “Hi were…” just JOHN dropping into “Squad Vowels.” Johnny closing his eyes and gently nodding his head to the amazing riffs he creates by his own two hands. Whereas John (Newton) with his entire being pummelled into the drums, both arms and a massive grin forming as Johnny faces up likes he’s absorbed into the sound. The sheer visceral intensity of JOHN is already apparent as awe is already through the crowd, John singing in rugged tones, firing on all cylinders at the drum set. Johnny standing by his faithful pedals, yet swaying back and forth with each purposeful strum, all of his being into all 6 strings. As soon as the new material comes in with “Standard Hauntings.” A colossus of a riff, that has the room already bouncing with both shoulders of the front row of people moving, heads from side to side, fists pumping, sweat dripping- its been 5 minutes into the gig.

After a decent amount of water consumed in the minimal gaps between each song John dryly announces “Hi, Manchester. I’m John, He’s John (pointing to a tuning and smiling Johnny)- We’re JOHN” calmly. This kind of dry humour evident of a band that clearly loves what they do, making really amazing music. In recent interviews they have often been described as “brutal” and “refreshing” and “perfectly produced” sounding like descriptions to a new and exciting drink at the trending new tavern; However, JOHN carry a double-edged sword where their live videos (e.g. KEXP) and to an extent their albums, don’t fully do them justice of what a truly fantastic live band they are. They charge pragmatically through one song to the next, including the 2nd single “High Digger” catchy and well-poised. Johnny’s excellent use of an EHX “Chill Switch” throughout each song, but in no ways “Chill” as the name describes. Carefully holding back a torrent of sound, letting the clear yet piercing guitar lines have moment, then a booming presence of the lower octaves through an adjoining amp combo, creating a full, rich and un-compromised sound that few can achieve. Further compounded by Johns primal, rhythmic fills, allowing him both the space to croon the microphone, and deliver carefully timed fills.

For a two piece, a lot of people assume that its easy to be tight and effective… this is not the case, as if you mess up its even more obvious with just two people. However, this band (other than an audience participation accident) didn’t put one single note or moment out of place, from “Squad Vowels” through to “Solid State.” Even with a failing snare drum, sincere and memorable to the end, and they hopefully will be coming back soon to Manchester, for even more “Brutal Refreshing Power.” Be sure to check out both JOHN albums: “Godspeed in the National Limit” (1) and the debut night performance for “Out Here on the Fringes” there EPs and any other. Hopefully will be seeing any and all who read this down at the next one.

 *“In the Prime of My Time, Like I was Born To Do This”* – Godspeed in the National Limit