

ON THE EDGE OF TIME



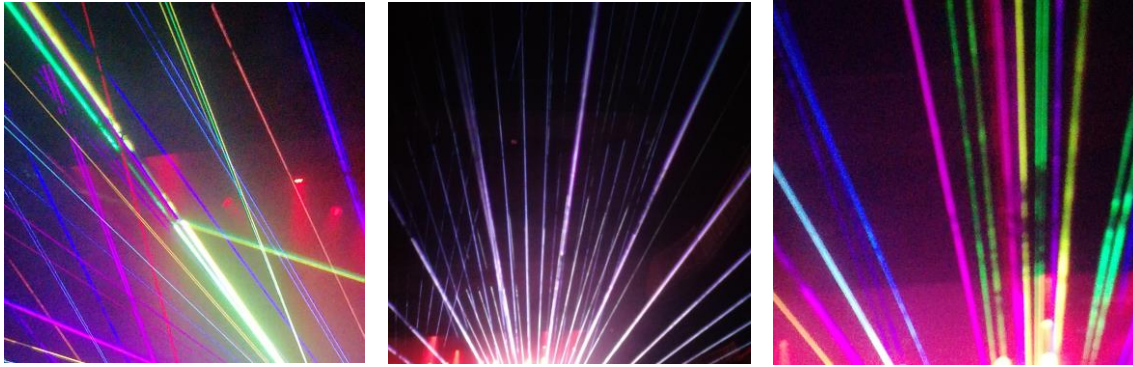
Hawkwind + Hanterhir, Hall for Cornwall, Truro, 17 June 2023

It is an odd contrast: the recently refurbished Hall for Cornwall, now looking like every other civic theatre I have ever been to, is almost full of older people in dishevelled t-shirts listening to 1970s rock. And if the audience clearly didn't get the memo about cutting your hair if you go bald on top, the band didn't get the one in the 1980s about lasers not being the future of rock'n'roll light shows.

But then Hawkwind have stuck with what they do for over 40 years now: monstrous rhythms carefully overlaid with guitar riffs, synthesizer trills and glissando sequences, not to mention moments of contrasting liquid guitars and strident singing. Songs are extended, mutated and blurred into another, or simply take a turn into a Pink Floydian moment of calm before revving up again for another take off.

I've never seen Hawkwind before, and although there are a few albums lurking in my collection, they aren't on heavy rotation. I suspect like a lot of people my age they came on to my radar as proto-punks, strident rebels with links to free festivals, Michael Moorcock, West London counterculture and an attitude which kept them as relevant as the emerging punk scene. Their brilliant 1977 album *Quark, Strangeness & Charm* helped too: it sounded totally of the moment, energetic, quirky and original, a kind of self-subversion foregrounding synthesizers and some of the wittiest lyrics they've ever composed.

Anyway, back to the present, as the band take us back to the past, except it's very much of the now. The music is relentless, and I don't mean that in a bad way. It draws you in and uplifts you. Like trance or classical minimalism it heightens your awareness of even small changes in texture, timing, mood and sound. Not to mention those moments when the music pauses for half a second then either drops into the glorious ascension of a bluesy guitar interlude or increases its pace to head for the finishing line. I guess I shouldn't be surprised how tight they are, they've had enough years to practice, but – like Gong, who were also so together it was shocking – I still think of them as a haphazard band riffing on the back of a truck with hippies gathered round.



The lasers work in a similar way. I can't pretend that they are any different to the ones in vogue for a couple of years in the 1980s. They shine beams of light out in a fan shape, beams which can be coloured, catch the smoke from the smoke machine, and can be moved to flicker and interact with beams from other lasers to make grids. But by using them almost non-stop throughout the concert, they act like a kind of strobe light or Brion Gysin dream machine, pulsing and shimmering, becoming almost part of the music.

I don't know the music well enough to give you track titles. The lengthy 'Levitation' was a standout, as was 'The Spirit of the Age', which became a kind of singalong as the whole auditorium contributed echoing backing vocals for the chorus call and response. I think they did 'Born to Go', and I know they didn't do 'Silver Machine'. I also know I had a great time, and that Thighpaulsandra is a great keyboard player, coaxing all sorts of mutant sounds from his set-up as well as supplying fluid melodic layers in the mix. The younger guitarist and singer Magnus Martin was also noticeable for his lovely guitar work, whilst the trio of Brock, Chadwick and Mackinnon are the foundations of the band. It's unbelievable how Dave Brock has been present on every single Hawkwind album (not to mention offshoot projects) and the energy his guitar and singing still contains.

Support – at the special invitation of Hawkwind themselves, who were watching from the wings – were local legends Hanterhir, a seven piece band who are hard to define musically. With violin, saxophone and flute laid over the top of guitars, drums and bass their music moves from psychedelic folk-punk to a more proggy rock (without the pretension). Despite taking the stage earlier than announced their 40 minute set kept us all entertained and won them plenty of musical converts, with their merch stand doing a brisk trade. Let's hope we have more evenings like this in Truro, rather than the endless parade of musicals and tribute bands that are generally on offer.

Rupert Loydell (review & live photos)