

# Shop 'til You Drop

Pet Shop Boys, Eden Sessions, Eden Project, 28 June 2023

There are clearly a couple of different versions of the Pet Shop Boys. For me, they are a pop synthesizer band offering poetic lyrics and subtle washes and layers of melody and texture; but it appears that for many others they are a banging dance band, which is mostly what we got at Eden. Distorted, sometimes physically stomach churning, bass was to the fore of the mix, powering most songs along like a sledgehammer, whilst videos that looked like outtakes from the original version of *Tron* or the Stargate sequence in *2001 A Space Odyssey* filled the stage-wide screen.

There's no denying, of course, the quality and catchiness of the songs. The mostly middle-aged crowd (as is generally the case at Eden) enthusiastically bopped along to each and every tune offered to us on this greatest hits tour. Even I knew most of them! It reminded me of other celebratory Eden gigs like Kylie Minogue and Duran Duran, the atmosphere more like a party than a concert.

After a few songs as a duo, the scenery shifted whilst Neil Tennant had a quick costume change, and the band expanded to include a live drummer and a couple more keyboard players; there was also a guest vocalist singing Dusty Springfield's part on 'What Have I Done to Deserve This'. Chris Lowe moved to the top of a block, centre stage, leaving room for Tennant in his Bacofoil reflective cape to parade across the front stage as he saw fit. It also gave more room for the pair of lamp posts, which were perhaps the real stars of the show, to be moved on and off with ease, by costumed stagehands. These served as lights, spotlights, dancing poles and at one point even starred in their own video.

Highlights? 'Jealousy' and the band's reinvention of U2's 'Where the Streets Have No Name' are both standout songs. Even if the latter started out as a pisstake, it remains an awesome adaptation. 'New York City Boy' and 'Suburbia' also managed to retain some subtlety, unlike 'So Hard', 'Go West', 'Opportunities (Let's Make Lots of Money)' and 'Single-Bilingual / Se a vida é', which were reduced to stomping beats with strained vocals struggling to be heard. Tennant has never been the world's best singer, but he was struggling for much of the evening, his half-spoken, half-sung vocals often lost in the mix. (Although, of course, the crowd singing along often made up for it.)

Best of all were the two encore songs; they definitely kept the best 'til last. 'West End Girls' continues to emit its urban siren call after so many years, especially to this West End Boy from London. It was one of the few singles (George Michael's 'Faith' was another) I remember cutting through the pop world's crap in the middle of the 80s, capturing perfectly the suppressed desire, sexual tension, allure and sense of the possible that cities can offer.

'Being Boring' ended the evening, and although it lost some of its wistful melancholy live, it retained its mournful nostalgia for youth and elegaic recall of the decimated AIDS generation, laid waste to by government inaction, public ignorance and homophobia. It's my favourite Pet Shop Boys song, and one of my all-time favourite videos.

So a fantastic end to a strange evening. Is it because the band had to perform in the light to start with, losing their neon charm and revealing how tacky the band's outfits actually are? Or is it to do with some kind of shift to big venues and the need to 'fill the space' and entertain the crowds? Or maybe they always wanted to be a dance band (or always were) and I have missed the point? Either way, I enjoyed the gig and am glad to see another band live I haven't before. Eden remains one of the best UK venues for live concerts, with enough space, toilets and bar facilities for everyone. But I will be going back to the albums with a sigh of relief and a ringing in my ears.

Rupert Loydell