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Hozier Previews New Album at Hollywood Forever Cemetery

Steve Gottfried · Wednesday, June 26th, 2019

Andrew Hozier-Byrne (aka Hozier), known to music fans worldwide as the man who popularized the man-bun, returned to Los Angeles on June 18th for a rousing concert at a cemetery. Not just any cemetery, but Hollywood Forever, final resting place to a veritable who's who of Hollywood's golden age from Judy Garland and Rudolph Valentino to Bugsy Siegel. It should be noted that besides being an active funeral home and crematory by day, Hollywood Forever cemetery moonlights as a thriving cultural arts center, hosting screenings, concerts and podcasts throughout the year. The choice of venue may seem a bit macabre to those who've never been to this landmark cemetery, but for those familiar with Hozier's lyrics, the venue fits like a glove. Take for example Hozier's creepily endearing love song "In a Week" from his first album, a duet between two lovers' rotting corpses. The spindly Irish folk/indie rock singer with the alluring vocals made an impressive splash in 2013 with his debut single "Take Me to Church." Six years later, Hozier is getting ready to launch his 2019 world tour for his sophomore album *Wasteland, Baby!* Hozier set a high bar with his eponymous first album, and while it seemed like an excruciatingly long wait for his hardcore fans (myself included), *Wasteland* is well worth the wait.

Armed with a press photo pass, I was granted front row access for the first three songs. Which not only provided a primo vantage point as a photographer, but put me smack dab in the force field of this magnetic performer's power. The electricity in the air was palpable as the music seemed to course through his veins. The only thing missing was thunder and lightning. While the spindly Irish singer may not everyone's idea of eye candy, there's something visually arresting about this 29-year-old indie music icon and his lean and lanky 6 foot 5 frame. Backed by an impressive band comprised of versatile musicians, they fully complemented the textures of his voice with rich orchestrations.

Hozier explores provocative themes in his new album at Hollywood Forever Cemetery.

Hozier opened the show strong with two songs from his new album, the first of which was called "Would That I," which starts off quiet and unassuming, evoking vintage Simon and Garfunkel (or Sufjan Stevens) until Hozier cranks up the voltage and unleashes his signature driving grit. The crowd was fully amped as Hozier segued into the title track from his 2018 EP "Nina Cried Power." Though he mainly lets his songs do the talking, Hozier prefaced the title track from his new album as inspired by the Doomsday Clock, a metaphorical construct coined in 1947 in the wake of the atomic threat. The Doomsday Clock was intended as a warning of the imminent threat to humanity brought on by humans. The closer the clock gets to midnight, the greater the peril. The impending

doom reflected in the clock's setting is updated periodically as the buffer between relative calm and apocalyptic despair fluctuates. Its current setting stands at two minutes to midnight, the closest (and most perilous) it's been since 1953. Hozier isn't the first to make art out of our collective anxiety about the end of the world. *REM's* "It's the End of the World (as we know it)" from 1987 comes to mind. *Smashing Pumpkins* wrote a song called "Doomsday Clock" in 2007. And before that in 1984, the British heavy metal band *Iron Maiden* wrote "Two Minutes to Midnight." As Hozier explained his spin on this apocalyptic theme to the crowd, he tried to infuse the song with a note of hope, that the last act on earth will be an act of kindness. He followed that cheerful song up with a lovely song about an unusual bird (a shrike) which makes its home near sharp objects, like barbed wire. Also known as a butcher bird, shrikes are carnivorous predators known for impaling their victims with said sharp objects. And therein lies the appeal of this millennial songsmith who finds beauty and mystique in the macabre.

Hozier fans like myself are drawn in by his unique artistry and indie, folk vibe. But to fully appreciate his music, it helps to read the lyrics which are crafted like Shakespearean sonnets where the meaning is not always immediately apparent but rather in the eyes of the beholder. Like Tim Burton, the cinematic master of the macabre, Hozier definitely has a gift for it as well and the ambience of this gorgeous cemetery was a fitting setting for his haunting ethereal vocals and introspective lyrics. Rounding out his collection of rather bleak but exquisite songs is "No Plan" which was inspired by astrophysicist Katie Mack who suggests that we not the sweat the small stuff because there are far worse things ahead. It sounds depressing on the surface, but to be honest, there's something strangely comforting about an artist who is willing to take on subjects we'd rather do our darnedest to shut out. If the world is indeed coming to an end, Hozier is my choice to provide the soundtrack. He infuses "No Plan" with an elegiac moodiness reminiscent of Bryan Ferry with the haunting refrain "there will be darkness again." A special nod to the lighting crew who worked their magic with colored lighting and visual effects to capture the mood and the drama of the songs and the performer. The two-hour, 19-song set included a generous mix of old and new from both albums. He ended the set with "Take Me to Church" which is always great, but in a strange way felt upstaged by his new material. Which is a good thing, and says a lot about the strength of his new material. My overriding takeaway at the end of the show was twofold: Gotta get this album and gotta see him perform live the next time he passes through town.

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