

## **C.W STONEKING**

### **Brownbrid Rudy Relic**

#### ***O2 Academy 2***

“It always feels a bit American to be drinking on a school night,” my friend says as the O2 Academy 2 stays rather subdued with the on-going music of the support act – BROWNBIRD RUDY RELIC – who is impressive, to say the least, and we realise that we have unearthed a cult following for a musician not many have heard of: C.W. STONEKING.

This man steps onto the stage wearing a 1950's style barbershop jacket and holding a banjo. It's him, but something's not right. Why does he look like one quarter of a barbershop quartet? He begins singing and playing the banjo and his voice resonates right through me as if I am hearing Louis Armstrong incarnate, a wailing sorrowful sound that makes each person gain once inch in height as they step onto their tip-toes to get better look at this man with a voice from another time. Around him are his band: trombone, cornet, tuba, snare drum (with brushes), and the cello hidden behind C.W.

There is an ominous feeling around us when the stage lights go out, and we don't know if it's supposed to happen, but C.W. is singing Jailhouse Blues and the audience begins to sing the chorus, either because they are his cult and know the lyrics, or he has hypnotised them with a mournful voice of a forgotten era. Lights back on, he bursts into a rendition of another bluesy song – Jungle Blues is a favourite – some quick-paced some not, spit flies out of the cornet, hits a photographer, flashbulb lights him up for one second prior to said spit, the leader of his cult, who were probably hooked when they saw him on Jools Holland a few months ago. He is a Crooner with a lisp.

There is a point when he speaks more than sings, but the subdued audience are attentive, and he recites a story of a talking lion, and it's hilarious. He's like a comedian halfway through his performance. He then makes jokes about himself as he pitches too high with his voice or sings too loosely. He jokes about not having a harmonica, the reason for a gap in the middle of one of his songs. It's this strange accent that fluctuates between Australian and The Deep South, which sounds constantly sad and broken, and he jokes about a story of three Americans on a ship to Africa who “loved the Blues, but they also loved the booze.”

At this point I should mention that C.W. was once a Hoodoo Witch Doctor's assistant, and only those who have seen him play will understand the hilarity, though someone shouts out “you can't

kid a kidder,” to which C.W. smiles gentlemanly at the realisation of how far-fetched his stories are – so why do I believe him?

He is loved in Liverpool, it's the humour, he is funny, but it's difficult to see how he does it. He doesn't make sense, and it's incredible. He is like an Australian time machine into 1950's New Orleans.

*Michael Holloway*