**Inhaler, Blackpool Empress Ballroom** - live review (597 words)

Blackpool, Vegas of the North. Accented by homemade signs and slogan-adorned hats, fans are called to the city like moths to flames - or slightly weather worn illuminations. With queues for Inhaler forming as early as 3am, you really could argue that the city that never sleeps has relocated by the sea. Tonight, Blackpool is alive, the Empress Ballroom its stammering heart.

Like an amp plugged directly into the bloodstream, the ballroom floor sends the opening chords to ‘These Are The Days’ firing through every vessel. Its infectious Indie Rock wastes no time in synchronising the pulses of everybody in the room. Energy turns electric; the potential sixteen hour wait a distant memory.

For a group that previously diagnosed themselves a ‘bad cover band’, this set is distinctly their own. Although, you may recognise their stolen glances and slyly collapsing grins from every rockstar of the last five decades. They radiate cool. Fan favourites like ‘We Have To Move On’ and ‘When It Breaks’ see the band reaching back into their short yet impenetrable catalogue - pinking cheeks as they go. Meanwhile, the irresistibly anthemic chorus of ‘My King Will Be Kind’ proves a setlist staple with a hook capable of holding up the ceiling’s chandelier. Somewhere between the trills and titillation, the room becomes one. They have our attention and if you just hold your sign high enough, you might get some of it back.

“I knew you could sing,” teases frontman Elijah Hewson. It feels like a raising of the stakes as the band launch into a series of tracks from their recent album *Cuts And Bruises* which fans have already adopted as sacred scripture. Amidst the jittery promise of ‘Love Will Get You There’ and the effortlessly assured ‘Dublin In Ecstasy’, attention becomes currency. All bets are off.

‘Cheer Up Baby’ and ‘It Won’t Always Be Like This’ - two sentiments that take each other by the hand. As do the crowd, becoming so buoyant that lifting a friend onto their shoulders is easy - and justifiable if it means getting any one of the four rockstars to break character for a nod of approval. The latter track incites a conflict of focus as bassist Robert Keating notices a fan recording him and points alternatively to Hewson who instead introduces an intoxicating solo from guitarist “Josh fucking Jenkinson.” You find yourself wishing you had four pairs of eyes.

With nothing left to look at but a stage littered with cowboy hats, the air before the encore is stolen by a collective inhale. A rare moment of calm. The lights go off and we’re rolling the dice again. Having shed their jackets in the break, the men of the hour return looking almost as stripped as the crowd feel. The tugging melody of ‘If You’re Gonna Break My Heart’ instantly undoes the tangled chaos that ‘It Won’t Always Be Like This’ left behind. It’s smart, it’s crashing, but it’s not quite a finale.

By the first “12345” in ‘My Honest Face’, serenity is punctured. If elation were made of helium, both the band and the crowd would be above the ground by now. Ending the show almost exclusively since its release, this song IS Inhaler. “Let’s take this place down with us,” Hewson calls to a crowd doing exactly that. With one last chorus and a thrumming note that carries you to the door, Inhaler unplug the amp. The crowd, chords still humming in their chest, disperse into the neon glow of the night. Each one newly wrapped in three words - Blackpool in ecstasy.