

X & Y BAR: 19.03.11

It's one of those summer hangover nights – the air is thick and humid, the rain just heavy enough to irritate – which is a fitting environment to experience Tom Hall's last foray into Brisbane's sonic jungle before he jets over to the US of A. Yet the clientele in the X&Y Bar – in particular a boisterous hens' do – seem to indicate that tonight's aural assaults may be a hard sell.

It's left to exuberant electro-pop quirksters Toy Balloon to kick off proceedings, which they do with aplomb, crafting a short, lively set that a small but overly appreciative audience lap up. Black Burst and Ornament are particular highlights, showcasing a maturing sound that splices Architecture In Helsinki-esque percussive rhythms with more “traditional” electro-house tropes. The disco-centric numbers bring out the dance moves in the most straight-laced of observers – Toy Balloon are a band that enjoys themselves. Lead vocalist and effects maestro extraordinaire Greg promises to get as loud as they can in honour of the headliner (“we won't get there as we are a pop band, but we'll try”) and even throw out their remix of AXXONN's Let's Get It Straight, which is a nice closing touch.

Without much layover from Toy Balloon's set, AXXONN gets under way, thanking everyone for stepping out for his last show on our shores before launching into a typically electrifying industrial set. The pure power that exists in these noise compositions are impressive coming from one man and his electronic toys, but even more impressive are the touchstones here – some of the more considered pieces evoke industrial noise pioneer Justin K Broadrick's more nuanced Pale Sketcher and Jesu projects, whilst there are moments where the synthetic distortion is dialled right up, using the quiet/loud dynamic that Trent Reznor used to great effect circa The Fragile. Hall's piano tinkering is just as beautiful as the droning effects can be brutal – and vice versa. Hall himself hovers over his keyboard, rocking back and forward like a man sonically possessed. The sound is perfect tonight too – nothing is lost in the mix, tone isn't compromised to the noise levels, leaving the sound as immersive as possible. The only drawback to tonight's show is its brevity – it would have been easy to hypnotize the punters for another half hour at the very least. Nevertheless, whilst not fully sated and mighty sad to see him go, it is a fitting conclusion to the opening chapter of AXXONN's sonic evolution.

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