

# Out & About

## Standing ovation for tribute show

LEAH SEATOR

You've got to admit, there is something in Eric Clapton's back catalogue that should suit everyone, and never was there more proof of this than when Classic Clapton played at the Phoenix Cinema.

The standing ovation — which we all know is saved by Orkney music fans for only the very best — was thoroughly deserved by the four men, who gave us two hours of hits from "Slow Hand's" lengthy career.

They pulled off everything from the raw, raucous tones of 1960s' supergroup, Cream, to his powerful 1980s' rock hits, which have become something of a badge of honour — if you'll excuse the pun — for Eric Clapton.

An Unplugged set, featuring the star's more delicate works as well as some blues numbers held the seated crowd captivated, before the show built up again to an exciting finale, leaving the crowd begging for an encore.

My husband and I saw the real Eric Clapton a few years back in Glasgow, and both agree with many — he is not the most enthusiastic frontman. But I can honestly say it was one of the most amazing concerts I have ever been to, because, while he may not address the crowd often, his powerful music speaks for itself.

Armed with hubby again, it was with great excitement that we took our seats, just a row from the front of the stage, prepared to enjoy the next best thing.

The lights went down, and an orchestral version of the powerful *Layla* outro played, as the band took their places on stage. On the way in, people queuing had mused over the Classic Clapton poster, wondering if the picture of the man portrayed could possibly be real.

When the lights came on, there was no doubting the uncanny resemblance of Classic Clapton frontman, Mike Hall, to Eric Clapton himself.

He certainly resembled the star, but would he really sound anything like him?

Well, as it happened, he really did. If you shut your eyes, you would hardly tell the difference between the two

voices, and to me, that was the biggest surprise of the night.

It just so happens that Mike is also a dab hand on guitar, and therefore ticks all the boxes. And this is all real. Real guitar playing, real vocal talent, and a real similarity to his appearance, without a need for make-up, or costumes. How it happened, no-one will ever know, but these coincidences combined have earned Mike two meetings with his hero, and a reputation as the best Eric Clapton impersonator you will probably ever meet!

In all, throughout the evening, he chatted to the audience much more than Eric Clapton might have done, and while some might say he seemed nervous, he appeared to charm everyone right from the start.

The band launched into the Cream song, *Badge*, and the power of the four musicians together was immediately apparent, fusing tight three-part harmonies, a great rhythm section, and one heck of a keyboard player.

Of course, the evening went on to provide a wealth of beautifully understated guitar solos, which gave us goose pimples in all the right places.

*Lay Down Sally* followed, after a confession from Mike that they were "four Orkney virgins" in our midst. They needn't have worried, for knees were bouncing, and fingers were dancing. The capacity audience was more than willing to make the band feel welcome in between



A lookalike and a sound-alike — Mike Hall from Classic Clapton is pictured performing at the Phoenix Cinema. (All pictures: *The Orcadian*)

songs.

After taking a swig of a rather non rock n' roll pint of orange juice, Mike and the boys launched into a riotous version of blues standard, *Hoochie Coochie Man*. From here on, I certainly was putty in their hands and, personally, I felt the band seemed most

natural and "at home" in their "bluesier" numbers.

The depth and volume added to the sound by the talented Paul Warren on keyboards was absolutely tremendous.

A version of George Harrison's *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* followed which,

of course, included a spine-tingling solo, before a twist in the mood took us back into the psychedelic realm of Cream, with Jack Bruce's, *I Feel Free*.

For those wondering, the band pulled off the famous acapella vocal intro beautifully, and the sound on this very different song was no less impressive.

In the Cream numbers, bass player Dave Robson shone particularly, easily handling the bass lines of one of the world's most gifted players. He also provided superb backing vocals on the night, as did Mr Warren on keyboards.

Mike often gave us a brief history of each song, setting the scene for what was to come and, at times, he invited the crowd to share their own knowledge of the songs.

An interesting addition to the set was a Derek and the Dominos version of Hendrix's *Little Wing*, which gave way for some superb drum fills by Neil Cochrane.

Neil was seemingly enduring a migraine at this performance (can you imagine a worse job with a migraine?), but we could never tell.

The Yardbirds' *For Your Love* was played, before Mike unleashed his pride and joy — a shiny red Gibson 355 guitar, which he said he had brought especially for the promoter of the gig, blues fan Colin Sinclair.

A performance of the Bluesbreakers' instrumental, *Hideaway* was more than sufficient for any blues fans in

the crowd and, again, Mike seemed at home, batting solos back and forth with Mr Warren on the Hammond.

*Wonderful Tonight* was of course received well by the crowd, as was *Tears in Heaven*, which we would later hear dedicated to the late Bert Weedon, in another of the show's more delicate moments.

After the interval, the Unplugged set gave us the much-loved acoustic version of *Layla*.

Mike was by now sporting a more casual paisley shirt and jeans, and a much more rock n' roll pint of ale, having ditched his plain black shirt and trousers, and orange juice.

This more relaxed approach was a real hit, comprising the Blind Faith song, *Can't Find My Way Home* and *Promises*, before the Gibson was back, for a blinding rendition of *I Shot The Sheriff*.

No Eric Clapton tribute would ever omit Cream's version of *Crossroads*, and it was authentically played as a three-piece, with the keyboard player looking on from the side.

The full band then played *Cocaine*, and blues song, *Farther On Up The Road*, before *Sunshine Of Your Love*, much to the delight of the audience.

Claiming they had run out of Eric Clapton songs, they offered us an "Estonian folk song" to round things off, and we were delighted then to hear the full rock version of *Layla*.

The band received a standing ovation, and the right to play two more songs, with the audience singing loudly along.

They paid tribute to Orkney businessman and music promoter Colin Sinclair for his hospitality and efforts in bringing music to Orkney, and I am delighted to report that Colin — who founded the original Orkney Blues Festival — is hoping to bring more acts to the county this year.

Congratulations to Colin, Classic Clapton, the sound men who did a sterling job, and anyone else who helped make this a night to remember.

This was not your average tribute act, but rather, as Mike put it himself, "just fans enjoying Eric Clapton's music with other fans."



The other stars of the show. From the left is drummer Neil Cochrane, bass guitarist Dave Robson and keyboard player Paul Warren.

## Free stalls for charities

The Cromarty Hall in St. Margaret's Hope is offering a free table at their Huge Spring Table-Top Sale this Sunday, May 6, to anyone who is raising money for a good cause or a charity.

There will be a Soup and Pudding Lunch in the cafe, a raffle, new and used goods, craft items and fundraising stalls as well as the ever-popular book sale, and a craft area for the youngsters.

The Hoxa Tapestry Gallery, which has relocated to the Cromarty Hall temporarily while their own gallery is being renovated, has a display of some of their pieces in the upstairs

room, which will also be open during the event.

The sale, exhibition and cafe will be open from 11am to 2.30pm.

Tables are still available to hire for everyone, at £5 each. For more information, or to book a table, call 831381.

The Cromarty Hall has an ongoing policy of offering free use of the main hall to fundraisers and charity events during their monthly Big Breakfasts or Lunches, and some Sundays are still available during 2012.

To find out more, call the number above, or get in touch through social networking site, Facebook.

## Firelounge gig for Dan Wilson

Highly acclaimed Scottish musician and songwriter Dan Wilson is to perform in Kirkwall's Firelounge, on Thursday, May 10.

Described as "the UK's best lyricist" by King Creosote, and October 2011's "Artist to Watch" by *Rolling Stone*, Dan will play an acoustic solo show in the county, as part of his islands tour. Such is his reputation as a songwriter, that King Creosote named him as his preferred lyricist in a "Fantasy Band," in an article for *The Independent*.

Wilson is the man behind the music of Withered Hand. The band have made four records, and played alongside many artists, including Jeffrey Lewis, King Creosote, Herman Dune, Calvin Johnson, Little Wings and Malcolm Middleton. In 2011, they headlined the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh as part of the Edinburgh International Festival Fringe 2011.

For more information, log on to [www.witheredhand.com](http://www.witheredhand.com).

