

Off the beaten tracks

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Regular readers (hello you two) will be painfully aware that there are two things I like – seeing gigs, and having a moan. And I have regularly pontificated in these pages about the parlous state of live music in the UK thanks to the steady disappearance of live music venues. But I'm starting to wonder if we've reached a tipping point. I mean, years ago I saw Snow Patrol play to 50 people in a quarry, and more recently waited for two hours on a canal towpath waiting for a band to perform (they didn't show up having got a puncture after their show at the Young Offenders institution). Last year I took in a Latin American-themed show at the local church, but to be fair my wee town is ill-served with suitable music venues.

Anyway, we've all seen a band in our church hall / tennis club – usually aged 17 and having snuck in a half bottle of vodka before throwing up in the bogs. Or was that just me? Twice in the past week, rather than having my feet glued to the carpet in some underground dive bar, I've taken in shows in some very odd places. Firstly there was a 'gig' in Roslyn Chapel. You know, the bizarre 15th century church frequented by the Knights Templar and Tom Hanks in the DaVinci Code. And The Damned's Rat Scabies in his quest for the Holy Grail (which is a whole other book). Unsurprisingly this was no punk gig, rather a harp troupe called Shine (happily, no Oasis covers were performed, instead nicely harmonised folk music). A couple of nights later it was Summerlee Museum of Industrial Life in Lanarkshire to see top indie act De Rosa (and a brass band) performing amid steam engines and cranes. This has me concerned however. What is it with this



fascination with oddball shows in weird places? Is it simply that we're running out of actual gig venues? Even The Beatles were forced to play on the roof of Abbey Road when they discovered that the O2 hadn't been built yet. Personally I'm looking forward to 2017 when the Detour promotions team start up again. The small outfit are renowned for their shows in odd places – on top of Ben Nevis, on a snowy Scottish/English border, libraries (shhh), even a river (actually IN a river – wellies supplied).

The team behind these shows usually keep their noses clean, unusual in the rock world, but guerilla gigs – performing somewhere without permission – were quite the thing for a while, until Half Man Half Biscuit described the "ultimate guerilla gig" location as being "in the middle of another band's guerilla gig" at which point everyone realised the game was up and went home. Detour's shows were usually free, but a bigger budget allows for more ambitious plans – Muse have declared that they want to play in space (planning

to be house band on the Virgin Galactic). The closest anyone's got so far is James Blunt on a jet liner at 41,000 feet, topping Spiritualised's liking for 'getting high' and rubbish puns when they performed in Toronto's CN Tower. Katie Melua is the deepest ever act by the way, not for her philosophical musings on bicycles in Beijing, but for going 303m under the North Sea on an oil rig. Jack White opted for another form of captive audience – an old folk's home – maybe a lightweight version of Johnny Cash's legendary prison gig, though things could turn nasty if an army of pensioners have to sit through 'Seven Nation Army' when they're waiting for Murder She Wrote to come on. But if you want real danger, there was that time death metal act Unfathomable Ruination played in a six-foot, air-tight, soundproof cube until they ran out of oxygen. The best bit was it was inaudible to the public. Now, if Katie Melua's short of inspiration...

On the stereo...



50FOOTWAVE

Bath White

Kristin Hersh comes from a long line of US alt.rock royalty, a couple of degrees of separation from The Pixies and Belly. Indeed, the first of these six tunes is very reminiscent of The Breeders' 'Cannonball', where former Throwing Muses bandmate Tanya Donnelly found more mainstream success. Hersh's new outfit is closer to grunge rather than the more introspective shoegazey sounds of her previous act - choppy guitar lines are propelled by syncopated drumming as the singer's distinctive drawl plays over the top, and songs fade away before, as on 'Human', pummeling the listener into submission. 'Rattled Out' is comparatively dreamy as guitar effects wash in and out, before 'Sun Salute' draws on all aspects of Hersh's past career for an epic closer.

★★★★☆