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# John Cooper Clarke is just what the doctor ordered

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*Courtesy of John Cooper Clarke*

## John Cooper Clarke

Rating: ★★★★★

The period between 1977 and 1982 may well have seen the greatest diversity in popular music in chart music history. A time that saw the rise and demise of punk, the rise of post punk and the emergence of New Wave, the New Romantics and hip hop. Not forgetting revivals of rockabilly, ska and reggae while disco went into decline, metal and rock rose and the novelty song reigned supreme. Into this mix, the punk performance poet John Cooper Clarke emerged recording several albums, performing alongside the Sex Pistols, New Order and The Buzzcocks, scoring a top 40 single in 1979 and a top thirty album in 1980. Now, over thirty years on, Doctor John Cooper Clarke as he has come to be known, continues to regale audiences with his verse and veracity. If Clarke has always skirted that space between mainstream success and cult status, the intervening years have seen the good doctor, when not battling heroin addiction, hidden in plain sight and keeping company with the Sugar Puff monster, the Sopranos and the Arctic Monkeys. Ending his

short Irish tour with a one night stint at The Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire, the iconic bard of Salford delivered an excellent evening of enlightened entertainment, with plenty of laughs thrown in for good measure, even if the venue left a little to be desired, with a constant traffic of late arrivals being ushered in, clunking up stairs and blocking aisles often mid routine, which distracted from an otherwise excellent experience.

The doctor's assistant on the night, Manchester's Mick Garry, was something of a revelation to those unfamiliar with his work. Performing a tight set, Garry's poetry shares Clarke's inventiveness and energy, but is a fresh thing onto itself. Hitting hard, with heart and with humour, Garry's poetry is fast, funny and deeply moving as it journeys through the darkness it puts into your head before switching to a declaration of love for his son in New Zealand. Garry's directness and simplicity, evident in "Penny for a Guy" and "Signify", a poem about an inspiring teacher, were a delight. And even if he fluffed a line or two from his chart-topping eulogy, "St Anthony: Ode to Anthony H Wilson," dedicated to Tony Wilson of Factory Records fame, Garry's thoughtful and thought provoking eulogy was one the highlights of the evening.

As the bard enters, it becomes clear that a John Cooper Clarke's gig sits somewhere between poetry recital and a stand-up comedy routine, with a lot more of the latter than the former, as well as a good night out hanging with a mate. A tour through minimalism, limericks and his passion for rhyming, the good doctor has the audience eating out of his hand, dressed in his trademark skin tight trousers, sunglasses and that uniquely recognisable hair. Freed from the musical restrictions of his former backing band "The Invisible Girls," Clarke performs acapella with his trademark, rapid fire, almost breathless delivery and his poems are all the better for it. Witty, whimsical and wonderfully entertaining, there's still a searing honesty and cutting edge to Clarke's acerbic scorn, and if the years have certainly mellowed him in places, they haven't blunted the edge. Like the rakishly thin good doctor himself, Clarke's older poems have weathered time well.

Things lag a little midway as Clarke, flipping endlessly through his copybook, drifts off into stories, jokes and anecdotes, with endless asides while responding to a heckle. It's fun and endearing for a time, feeling improvised and unpredictable, but it's time that could have been better served with the inclusion of several Clarke classics into the set, such as "Kung Fu International" and "Twat" to name but two, which the audience cried out for. Clarke's irony and dislike for political incorrectness may also have smarted some LGBT sensibilities, but back to back "Beasley Street" and "Beasley Boulevard", along with "Hire Car" as well his poem come lyrics for the Arctic Monkey's love song, "I Wanna Be Yours" reminded us of the great doctor at his best. Ending with "Evidently Chickentown," Clarke left the audience wanting more, both in a good and a bad way, with many of those who came to hear their favourites performed one more time feeling just a tad cheated. But those who just wanted to hang with the doctor, or were meeting him for the first time, were seriously impressed, and all left laughing and exhilarated by a poet who, like his work, never seems to get old.

For more information, visit [John Cooper Clarke](#)



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