

Jane Birkin makes Serge Gainsbourg's music sing

Noel Mengel | The Courier-Mail | March 20, 2012



Jane Birkin Source: Supplied

WITTY, charming, dazzlingly beautiful: we all knew that about this star of screen and stage.

But surely what this capacity crowd in Brisbane's Powerhouse Theatre did not suspect was how ravishing this music would be and how fresh this great band would make it sound.

We should have been prepared. When I interviewed Jane Birkin before this tour she was ecstatic about this group of Japanese musicians she had met on a trip to that country shortly after the tsunami, and the way they were helping her interpret the music of her mentor Serge Gainsbourg, for whom she was both muse and lover for 13 years.

And at this performance she beamed throughout as these astonishingly assured players breathed fresh life into Gainsbourg's music. As ever, she charmed the socks off her audience, chatting merrily in English between songs with her memories of Serge and delivering the songs as they were meant to be heard, in French.

It didn't matter if you did not speak the language or only knew a few phrases, the power and the emotion this music knows no borders.

The band is led by pianist (and film composer) Nobuyuki Nakajima, a player of extraordinary skill, as are his colleagues, with the fiery, Stephane Grappelli-like violin tone of violinist Asuka Maret, the trombone and trumpet of Shuishiro Sakaguchi and the wonderfully subtle work at the drum kit by Tsutomu Kurihara.

Birkin, looking as stylish as ever in black pants and white shirt, worked the stage, even dancing through the audience, kissing hands along the way. Material ranged across the decades, tunes from the early '60s through to songs from *Amours Des Feintes*, the album Gainsbourg wrote for her just before his death in 1991.

There was room too for material from *Histoire De Melody Nelson*, the Gainsbourg's concept album which was a commercial flop on release but is now more loved than ever, thanks in part to the thumbs-up from fans like Rufus Wainwright and Johnny Depp.

And songs like *Do Di Dah* still shine in these playful, jazzy settings.

Birkin appeared to be as dazzled by the response from this audience as we were by the music, taking multiple bows with her band at the end with everyone on their feet and calling for more.

It's been her mission to keep preaching the gospel of Gainsbourg so that there is better understanding of his music outside of France. She could not have found five more sympathetic allies than those with her on this unforgettable night of music.

Jane Birkin, Brisbane Powerhouse, March 19

Reviewed by Noel Mengel