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**'Brock has assembled arguably the strongest line-up ever.'**

# Sonic Attack

As Hawkwind's annual yuletide shows took flight again across the UK, **Raziq Rauf** was in London to find out if Brock and co still had the old magic...

## Hawkwind

The Forum, London

★ Down the road in Camden Town, spritely noiseniks Gallows are pulling a double shift with a show either side of supper and as you walk into the Bull And Gate - the pub next door to the Forum - you'd be forgiven for assuming that Hawkwind were pulling the same stunt. However, it is but a well-honed and humourously-named tribute band. There is no doubt that Hoaxwind have pulled a few revellers in off the street on this bitterly cold evening for some pre-gig solace and that's more than likely why there aren't too many present to watch the early theatrics of The Jokers. Main support, Hot Steppers fare better in terms of both attendance and appreciation but, ultimately, everyone here is just waiting for the mighty Hawkwind to take the stage.

It's quite the luxury to be able to choose tracks from two dozen studio albums and after 40 years of space rocking around the globe, it's the kind of wealth that Dave Brock has afforded himself but, after some whooshes and swirls, it's the title track of their most up-to-date album, *Blood Of The Earth*, that kicks things off tonight. The band's confidence in the new album is clearly high - and rightly so - as they play another four tracks from it tonight. The tentative moshpits that start during the closing song from the newer set, the revived version of *You'd Better Believe It*, both grow in size while never really getting off the ground.

Needless to say, the ringleaders have their hearts in the right places, even if their actions aren't totally appreciated by others all around them.

A huge positive that is noticeable from the first whirls of the theremin is the quality of the sound tonight. Every whiz, wail and keyboard solo is audible in crystal clarity and while the travelling troupe has had the rest of the tour to perfect the sound levels; for example, the way *Spirit Of The Age* sounds tonight is absolutely magnificent. The vocals sound as strong as ever and - fittingly, with its classic status - it sits perfectly alongside newer material. It's a salient

point that Brock has now assembled arguably the strongest Hawkwind line-up ever and that never hurts in making a band sound good. In stark comparison to Mr Dibs' stationary figure, Tim Blake's frequent forays from behind his keyboards to pretty much anywhere else adds an extra dynamic to the show. Draping his keytar over his neck, his languid episodes across the stage are a common element tonight, along with his longest solo clocking in at almost five minutes. Not bad, but it's always painful to see a theremin neglected for so long.

It's the hard work and the high standards that Brock set himself that has allowed the band to have a meaningful career of this length. That Hawkwind are able to command venues of this size so long after they started is testament to that. Half the reason that they are still able to tour so successfully is that the punter really does get value for money from their ticket purchase. While some bands are content with just the handful of members on a bleak stage that has maybe just a backdrop for company, these guys go all out. If the music somehow fails to create vast, twisted landscapes of colour in your imagination, the superbly orchestrated lights coupled with wild, apocalyptic projections will definitely help. Throw in a couple of lovely dancing ladies and it's a sure hit.

Initially taking to the stage in metallic spandex and wild headdresses, Hawkwind's cavorting characters continue to appear with their own take of conceptual dancing whether it be dressed like giant purple druids (on stilts, of course), the archetypal angels of death (complete with scythes) or just tottering about in bare feet while having a dance. Either way, they add to the viewing experience tenfold.

It's been a hugely enjoyable evening all round and with more dates already booked in for 2011, there seems to be no end in sight for Hawkwind. Dave Brock appears to have found a way to balance the diminishing dynamism of the band's performance with an increasingly exciting and uniquely ostentatious live show. It's an absolute winner. While wishes for another 40 years of creative output might be slightly excessive (and impossible), on the evidence of tonight, the possibility of even more from Hawkwind can only be celebrated.



Mr Dibs: nice little gurner.