

Lofty heights

Master guitarist, sharp songwriter, impassioned singer... RT discovers the elixir of eternal youth. By Colin Irwin

Richard Thompson



Dream Attic PROPER

RICHARD THOMPSON with his under up is always a thrilling prospect and, fresh from curating his own Meltdown festival on London's South Bank and winning MOJO's Les Paul Award, his blistering album will surely confirm 2010 as one of the most productive and celebrated years of his long, illustrious career. When you're a master guitarist and a consistently outstanding songwriter and have maintained reverential respect in parallel genres of folk and rock for over four decades, you might be excused for relying on a rich back catalogue to cement legendary status.

Not RT, who has adopted the extraordinary and highly risky – strategy of recording his latest album of brand new material in front of a live audience. No half measures, either, in the hard-rocking four-piece band grouped around him pounding out some of the toughest material he's ever written. He mercilessly pillories drinkers on the sardonic *The Money Shuffle*, encompassing one of his trademark searing guitar solos; he graphically depicts the finer details of a gruesome London murder in the dramatic *Sidney Wells*; and he exhilaratingly packages carefree images of a bygone era in the *End of London on Demons In Her Dancing*



Shoes. Nothing, though, quite prepares you for the poison he unloads with such relish on *Here Comes Geordie* which, however strenuously he denies it, sounds like a thorough dismantling of Sting (“*Here comes Geordie in his private plane, got to save the planet once again/Good old Geordie righteous as can be, chopped down a forest just to save a tree...*”)

There are more solemn interludes as he contemplates passing time, movingly pondering bereavement on *A Brother Slips*

Away – a future funeral favourite – while offering a particularly bruised resignation with *Stumble On* and howling intensely at the ageing process throughout *Crimescene*, an agonised track that wouldn't sound out of place on a Radiohead album.

Such contemplative moments are untypical, however, of an album that flies at you with a velocity that fully vindicates the decision to record it live on its debut shows along America's West coast. While Thompson himself hasn't let rip on the guitar with such abandon for a long time – the solo that closes the album on *If Love Whispers Your Name* is mind-bogglingly good – the frenzied rhythms and flying electric fiddle of *Joel Zifkin* even evokes distant memories of early

Swarb-era Fairport. Any lack of sophistication is fully obliterated by an outrageous vigour normally only found in new, young bands attacking songs written days earlier.

Almost impossible to replicate in the studio, this is the level of energy and conviction which drives the album as a newly buoyant Thompson discovers his second (or more likely his fourth, fifth and sixth) wind. Scintillating.



Richard Thompson: a no frills thrill.