

**Pop**  
**Richard Thompson**  
**Festival Hall**

★★★★★



**Richard Thompson: folk guitar hero**

**R**ichard Thompson has been spreading his wings with all sorts of musical dalliances in recent times. Several of these bore fruit at last year's Meltdown Festival in London, which he curated, and his contribution to the arts was recognised when he was appointed OBE in the 2011 New Year's Honours List. But it has been a while since Thompson simply showed up with a band and played the unique brand of electric guitar folk that originally made him one of England's most distinguished cult heroes.

His latest album, *Dream Attic*, marks a thrilling return to the classic Thompson ensemble sound. To underline the point, the album's 13 new songs were recorded live in concert in America, with an outstanding backing group including the saxophonist Pete Zorn and the violinist Joel Zifkin.

Accompanied by the same musicians, Thompson put on a show of mercurial mood swings and consistent brilliance at the Festival Hall. The first half was taken up with songs from *Dream Attic*, beginning with *The Money Shuffle*, a typically humorous piece of character assassination, which Thompson dedicated to "our friends in the financial sector". A darker addition to the rogues gallery came with *Sidney Wells*, a gruesome tale about a truck driver and serial killer, performed in an appropriately fiendish 9/8 time signature — otherwise known as slip-jig time, apparently. With the drummer Michael Jerome and bass player Taras Prodaniuk riding the oddly galloping rhythm, and Zorn and Zifkin supplying an exotic blend of violin and sax sounds, Thompson snapped out the lyrics in his undertaker tone. He then embarked on one of the most extraordinary electric guitar solos you could imagine in just about any genre. It was one of many occasions throughout the show when he deployed quicksilver combinations of harsh bends and a haunting vibrato to paint ingenious melodic streaks on an already richly coloured musical canvas.

The second half of the show was an equally memorable trawl through his enormous back catalogue beginning with *The Angels Took my Racehorse Away*, a rare sortie back to his 1972 album *Henry the Human Fly*. It ended with an engaging encore of *I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight*, in which Linda Thompson's vocal part was supplied by Richard and Linda's daughter Kami Thompson. A show of pure magic from start to finish.

**David Sinclair**

**Tour continues at City Hall, Salisbury, tomorrow (01722 434434)**