

DOOM AT THE BRIXTON ACADEMY, LAST THURSDAY! (421 words)

How to lose fans AND alienate them? DOOM, the rapper's rapper's rapper, and the language's finest rhymester since Byron (scientifically verified), wrote the book. What about his sending an impostor to lip-sync through some recent US gigs, for example? (the ruse unsuccessfully abetted by the fact DOOM always – but ALWAYS – sports a metal mask in public.) Why? “People are asking more now for live shows,” DOOM ‘explained,’ “and I’m charging more, so it must’ve worked somewhere.” Charming.

Nevertheless, reassured by reports that promoters insisted on a contractual obligation compelling him to actually show up — something average contracts apparently don’t include — 5000 fans filed into Brixton Academy for the first proper UK gig of DOOM’s decade-long solo career, reasonably confident that their £30 tickets would be honoured by the man himself.

Sidelining the question of whether or not he’d show, expectations were high. In a genre where the words ‘live album’ are about as harmonious as ‘philosophical pornography’, DOOM has already managed two exceptional ones, demonstrating that the injection of onstage adrenalin into his unique verbal sound patterns can compensate for the loss of studio texture and nuance.

At about 9:30, a familiar voice (like Sly Stone after a course of dianetics) seeped out over our heads from the vast speakers flanking the still-empty stage.

“Y’all don’t know me,” it said, earning a broad cheer.

‘Passive aggressive, that,’ I thought, narrowing my eyes.

DOOM emerged a couple of minutes later. You could tell it was him by the belly. Always big, it’s now so solid and vast it looks like he’s about to beget a sizeable calf. Beginning with a handful of cuts from the classic *Madvillainy*, DOOM delivered a full-blown best-of set, leaving none of his eight peerless studio albums untapped, but there was something disappointing about seeing one of the most mercurial and inventive talents of the noughties offer such a neat encapsulation of his oeuvre. The DOOM of today, as evinced in the recent *Born Like This*, is maudlin, cerebral, eccentric and dramatic, and in Brixton it felt as if its creator was chickening out of successfully executing his latest incarnation live. As such, there was a hollow ring behind the undoubted verbal virtuosity. The crowd, which had hollered at every familiar number and flung their hands up throughout, had vanished even before the lights came back on.

DOOM himself seemed more present the times he stayed home.