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Every song draped in strings: Final Fantasy/Timber Timbre pervade Knox United Church

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The church had become a David Lynch film. Timber Timbre will do that to a place, impart it with such an unsettling but strangely lovely mood that even a solid structure like Knox United Church is transformed into a world of backwoods and shadows.

We were held silent observers in those sturdy pews of dark gleaming wood, while the vibrant stained glass that punctuated the stone walls and soaring ceiling caught the subdued lighting perfectly and cast a surreal glow over everything. When Taylor Kirk and band began their set, they did so in utter silence, with just a couple of soft, barely imperceptible touches of the violin strings interspersed with an occasional guitar twang, all set against a backdrop of bird sounds. As the music gradually rose, the atmosphere escalated alongside, until I was convinced we were watching a soundtrack come to life.

In the film running through my mind I saw long abandoned farm houses and ominous flocks of silent birds, with shadowy veiled figures lurking silently in the background. The acoustics at Knox United Church are so perfect that every nuance of Kirk's dark and eerie vocals, every haunting reverberation of the lap guitar, hung like crystals in air. The feeling of being frozen in some sort of freaky otherworldly cinema was inescapable.

The atmosphere shifted entirely when Final Fantasy took the stage. A creepy film morphed into a video game. As though a collectively held breath were released, the audience relaxed, still attentive, still respectfully silent during the performance, but discernibly more at ease.

Perhaps it was the outfit. Debate raged along our pew as to whether we should refer to the utterly amazing long, wide, sleeveless smock that Owen Pallett wore over his jeans and mock turtleneck as a Wizard Gown or a Star Wars Tunic. Featuring a pattern of solar systems and swirling galaxies of such splendour as I have never before witnessed onstage let alone on a garment, suffice it to say general consensus was that it was stunning.

Poor Owen was obviously in a world of hurt on Monday night. I cringed every time I saw him wince to hit the drawn out high notes, but stalwart soul that he is, he soldiered on with a lively and playful performance. Not overly chatty perhaps, and who would be when they were saving their voice for singing, but with the flourishes and theatricality that we have come to expect of a night with Final Fantasy, this time along with gestures of acknowledgement and appreciation to his new musical partner, Thomas. No illness is gonna keep Owen Pallett down for long.

The addition of band mate made for a richer more polyphonic production than one generally hears at a Final Fantasy concert. Yes, Owen has always used looping and layering to great symphonic effect, but the addition of live guitar, drums and an assortment of handheld percussion instruments, as well as the interplay between the two musicians onstage, made for a sound that was denser, richer, and more complex.

Ironically, and perhaps a fault of the near perfect acoustics that Knox United Church conveys, I found that at times the sound was somewhat too rich and dense, and almost overwhelmed the space within the church walls. It seemed a bit muddier than it needed to be, and I missed the beautiful stripped down clarity that had always defined a Final Fantasy performance for me. When Owen returned to the stage to give a solo encore, however, I could feel the precision and clarity of man and violin, which I had always admired, resurfacing. I was thrilled when he launched into the encore with Bloc Party's *This Modern Love*, as I consider Owen Pallett's version to be arguably the best cover in the history of best covers.

I'm told that Final Fantasy's outdoor performance at London's LOLA Fest recently was light, airy, and quite impeccable, leading me to believe that perhaps in a less confined setting, Monday night's performance could have been something even more sublime. As it was, it was a brave venture of musical experimentation, melding new works with revamped crowd favourites. A Final Fantasy performance is always a joy, always an aurally tactile affair to be savoured with ears wide open. Marrying Pallett's brand of playful orchestral pop with the dark and cinematic songs of Timber Timbre offered a sumptuous smorgasbord of auditory flavours. It was a very tasty evening.

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