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Live Set Review: Will Hoge and Bronze Radio Return

10/07/09 at 05:49 AM by [Gregory Robson](#)

Two of the best roots-rock albums released this year are Will Hoge's *The Wreckage* and Bronze Radio Return's *Old Time Speaker*, and both visited New York City this past weekend.

Appearing Thursday at the Bowery Ballroom Will Hoge and his three-piece band (drummer Sigurdur Birakis, bassist Adam and guitarist, multi-instrumentalist Devin Malone) performed a sterling set of 20 lullabies and rockers. Though he drew on a handful of songs from new album *The Wreckage*, Hoge also tackled much of his back catalog, including songs from 2001's *Blackbird on a Lonely Wire* ("Not That Cool," "Secondhand Heart," "Someone Else's Baby") as well as 2000's *Carousel* ("Ms. Williams"). This surprising tactic was not lost on the crowd, who seemed to sing along to every song from the first minute Hoge opened his mouth and seemed to get the biggest kick out of hearing "Someone Else's Baby."

Highlights of the night included the sparse "The Wreckage," the sweetly affecting "Lover Tonight," and the bittersweet heartache of "Someone Else's Baby," and "Dirty Little War," all four featuring Hoge an acoustic guitar and seated in a foldable chair. He even tackled the piano on "Too Late Too Soon," the closer off of *The Wreckage*, but the tactic appeared to be a bit of a misstep as the Nashville songwriter was buried at the back of the stage. Save that for one fumble, there was little about the site that was disappointing. Rousing rockers "Long Gone," and "Highway Wings," featured the same amount of tenacity as fiery cuts "Sex, Lies and Money," and "Better Off Now That You're Gone."

It's been well-documented since his major label debut *Blackbird on a Lonely Wire*, that Hoge bears the torch of heartland rock, passed on from the likes of Petty and Springsteen. A performer who always puts his all into every performance, his frenetic intensity is very much akin to Springsteen and his laid-back charm very reminiscent of Petty, making for a most accurate label. While his studio performances are always engaging, there are few things like seeing Hoge in concert. Ever charismatic Hoge charmed the crowd detailing his love of his New York; his appreciation to his newfound family at Rykodisc, even admitting that they have restored his faith in record labels; and defended his Southern drawl and propensity to babble in between songs. Armed with gratitude, sincerity and humility, he was the consummate gentleman and was never once pretentious or disaffected. Add to it the contributions from Burkis, Ballard and Malone and the night made for one of the more spectacular sets of heartland rock this reviewer has heard in the past few years.

Three days later, Hartford, CT's Bronze Radio Return performed an hour-long set of Midwestern roots-rock, culled mostly from their album *Old Time Speaker*. Beginning with the groove-rock of "Lo-Fi," the band then dipped into 2007's "Shade Tonight." Expanding on the original version, the song featured an extended harmonica solo by Craig Struble, two organ flourishes from Matt Warner and a fiery guitar solo from Patrick Fetkowitz. Building on that momentum came the cheery pop of "Digital Love," with its radio-ready chorus and Henderson's smooth vocals. Never once out of synch, and utterly flawless, the Nutmeg sextet moved effortlessly from song to song.

The real apex of the set was the bouncy "It's Okay Now," which featured a 90 second five-drum assault, with each member banging various drums, cymbals and snares. The percussive intro was an effective and skilled tactic that proved the band's spontaneity and ability to deviate from the script. A dip back into another old song proved once again to be a chance for the band to showcase their inherent ability to jam. A request from the 50 plus fans in attendance to play one more song, brought the band out on stage for their country-pop sendup "Pullin' On The Reins," providing an effective punctuation mark on an overwhelmingly entertaining set of easy-to-please roots rock.

Though their name still remains below the surface, their set at the Mercury Lounge revealed that they are most certainly a band to contend with in the years to come. Armed with maturity beyond their years, Bronze Radio Return are truly on the precipice of something great.

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