

Review for the 4th UKBlues Challenge 2017 @ The Cavern Club, Liverpool - 10.09.17

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This was certainly a day to remember at the iconic Cavern Club in Liverpool, with five bands going head to head to win the 4th UKBlues Challenge. The winner would go on to represent the UK at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis USA and at the European Blues Challenge in Hell, Norway in 2018

In the dark bowels of the Cavern Club the atmosphere was steamy and electric. The first act to take the stage was Elles Bailey and her band. This astounding young lady from Bristol is a the rising star and the band gave a brilliant performance. They played a mix of self penned and classic material from Americana to traditional rootsy blues, interlaced with raw rocky numbers. On vocals and keys, Elles's amazing husky voice is made for the blues, some superb slide guitar from the lead guitarist and perfection playing from the rest of the band. She describes her music as 'rootsy blues, country and soulful rock'. Her debut album 'Wildfire' has just been released.



Elles Bailey Photo courtesy of Nicki Vinall

The second band, hailing from Shrewsbury, were the Rainbreakers. With a mix of well put together blues, rock, funk and soul, they performed some of the numbers from their excellent EP, 'Rise Up'. Great vocals and guitar from front man Ben Edwards, with Charlie on excellent lead guitar, Peter on bass and Sam on drums, demonstrating the true versatility and tightness of the band. A fantastic performance proving there is certainly nothing average about these guys!



Rainbreakers Photo courtesy of Nicki Vinnal

The third band were Robert J Hunter Band, a three piece from London. Kicking off with some up tempo rhythm and blues, they gave a high energy performance. With a mix of blues rock, funky blues and a dash of slow blues, the young performer Robert, on vocals and guitar, certainly has a great future.



Robert J Hunter Band Photo courtesy of Nicki Vinnal

The fourth band were the charismatic 'LaVendore Rogue' from Essex, they gave their individual take on blues inspired Americana. With a mix of material, they certainly are a performance band. The flamboyant JoJo Burgess fronts the band, delivering fantastic vocals, aided by Joel Fisk, one of the best electric and slide guitarists on the circuit today. Stephen 'Cupsey' Cutmore continued to keep the rhythm in check on drums and percussion, Warren Lynn on keys and James Payze on bass. A great take on their classic 'Dead Man's Chest', with some alternative Charley Patton blues. A superb performance throughout and are definitely 'once seen never forgotten'.



LaVendore Rogue Photo courtesy of Christine Lerman

The last band to perform were Zoe Schwarz Blue Commotion from Dorset. Zoe has a superb voice not unlike that of Billie Holiday and was well supported by her band. Playing a mix of blues, jazz and country they displayed a variety of tempo's in a very polished set.



Zoe Schwarz Blue Commotion Photo courtesy of Jason Elliot

After much deliberation from the judges, who were chosen from different areas of the 'blues' fraternity, the decision was made that LaVendore Rogue would be the band to represent the UK in the International and European Blues Challenges 2018. A popular choice with the enthusiastic crowd, but it has to be said it was a difficult decision to make because of the high standard of all the bands involved.



Blues Jam - LaVendore Rogue, Connie Lush, Kaz Hawkins, Kyla Brox, Victor Brox

As a finale to the evening, LaVendore Rogue returned to the stage for another set. They were joined on stage by Connie Lush, Kyla Brox, Victor Brox and Kaz Hawkins (last year's winner), for a 'blues jam'. What a brilliant day it had been, hosted jointly by The Cavern, as part of their '60 Years' celebrations and the UKBlues Federation who were the organisers of the event. Well done to all the bands who took part and good luck to LaVendore Rogue who will be flying the flag for the UK in 2018.

**Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer**

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