



ALI AND THE THIEVES – COHEN KOANS

Camelot Lounge, Marrickville
Upcoming Basement show: May 31

I went on a hunch. I didn't quite know what to expect as I climbed the steep, fluoro-lit stairs to the Camelot Lounge. By pure chance I had caught Ali Hughes and Daryl Wallis at the Queen Vic in Enmore the week before. As it happens I was glad to have ventured out on this particular wet Sunday because afterwards there were too many spine-tingling moments to count.

Inside Camelot it was vivid and red-hued and at first, it seemed likely to wear out

the senses quite quickly. Not to mention the camel fetish. Winged dromedaries were strung from the ceiling, painted ones decorated the walls and a large stuffed one obscured the bathrooms. Then into this oasis wandered the statuesque Hughes followed by her back-up singer and three-piece band.

The "Cohen" part refers to Canadian poet and singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen but this was so much more than a well-executed covers show. As the evening unfolded, it was obvious that what was being offered was a deeply personal response to some influential compositions.

From the opening number, 'The Guests', there were some surprising arrangements in store for the attentive crowd, notably an exquisitely wistful take on 'Dance Me to End of Love' and a soaring version of 'If It Be Your Will'. Remarkably

amongst the audience there was no flare of iPhones or crap chatter and this performance deserved no less. The patter between songs included the explanation of Koans as well as some insight as to why these insanely talented musicians were drawn to this material.

Hughes onstage proved a sensual, enigmatic presence. She seemed to dissolve into the songs she was singing. Her voice had both intense warmth and a startling range.

A former *SMH* reviewer, Stephen Dunne once wrote that Wallis was "quite simply the best piano-playing-while-diva-sings bloke" he'd ever seen. How true. The rest of the band were solid with Michael Galeazzi on upright bass, Toby Hall on drums and percussion, and Jared Carroll on backing vocals.

This show is bound for the Big Apple but you can still catch them at The Basement on May 31.

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