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## Live Review - Meredith Music Festival, Meredith 2009



by [andrewcrook](#) on Dec 16 2009, 11:00AM

### Meredith Music Festival

*Meredith Supernatural Amphitheatre*

Fri 11, Sat 12, & Sun 13 December 2009

*By Andrew Crook. For Marcus' take on Meredith 2009, read [yesterday's post](#).*

For years now, cynics have been proclaiming Meredith's imminent death as the festival treads a supposed path from DIY credibility to cookie cutter soullessness. The die-hards and characters have stayed away (or decamped to Golden Plains) to make way for a new generation of anorak'ed pill monkeys with cash to burn, or so the theory goes. Balls-out Oz rock has been subsumed by Pitchfork sulks toting egos and managers.

Meredith is a serious business. Tickets are squabbled over and debate over which bands get certain slots is fierce. The stage, showers and tucker tents are permanent and punters respond accordingly -- Friday pilgrimages start at 4am, tent cities arise like clockwork and amphetamine orders are submitted weeks in advance.

Organiser Matt High told *The Age* as much on Sunday, "it was definitely the smoothest, easiest and best behaved crowd and with the most enjoyable patrons we've had in 19 years". And yep, the rain held off, with only the occasional tent spattering the only reminder of last year's washout.

It's true that Meredith has a formula and that formula that sells like hotcakes. But as corporate festivals spread like syphilis, it still stands alone. Meredith continues to reject sponsorship, even to the extent of sidelining Triple J (an endorsement that would almost certainly cut ticket prices from the current envelope-pushing \$280). And many die-hards remain on board -- the first steps into the Supernatural Amphitheatre each year stirs up so many flashbacks that in a world without work many regulars would probably stay forever in a permanent shuffle between the stage and their tent.

The spontaneity persists too -- a makeshift beer slip-and-slide, a wheelchair Esky-jump and an unofficial home-brewing centre featured alongside reports of a Sunset Strip marriage. But what about the music I hear you ask?

On Friday I arrived to the far-off yelping of an angry and desperate **Witch Hats**, a last minute call-up to replace San Diego's **Crocodiles**. Tent setting ensues. As the sun sunk lower I approached the stage to witness **Akron/Family** start with new single 'The River', prompting a gentle rhythmic shuffle, even among the uninitiated. They're a kind of spaced-out 60s beat unit, and the seared bleeps sat well even as the momentum flagged.

Next up was **Sia Furler**, the Adelaide beneficiary of celebrity endorsements from the likes of Beck and Christina Aguilera but a dominant presence in her own right. Sia was always going to puzzle sections of the audience who hadn't witnessed the final scene of *Six Feet Under*, which her 2004 single 'Breathe Me' serenades. But her laid-back warbling still worked, despite the obvious unfamiliarity with Meredith and the festival's unfamiliarity with her. A risky but rewarding choice -- a trio of new songs including 'Clap Your Hands' sounding like Top 10 pop smash in the making. But it was the opening piano line on 'Breathe Me' that prompted screams of recognition from the wannabe Claire Fishers

Those craving a jerk back into self-loathing sludge weren't going to get it from **Patrick Wolf**, the towering British dandy with dreams of world domination. An indication Wolf was going to uphold the slickness came during the setup, when DJ Fee B Squared's "interstitial soundtrack" was thankfully nixed so the roadies could get the levels right. The 'Hard Times' single, and a memorable 'Magic Position' got the best reaction as the boy wonder bounded about in a Halliwell-aping Union Jack jumpsuit. During an amazing 'Bluebells', Wolf's best song, the rustic charms of the Nolan family farm were eclipsed by a high-wire balancing act straddling Bowie and Lady Ga Ga.

Wolf and Sia might have been interpreted as a red rag to the die-hard **Tumbleweed** fans huddling together as the temperature plummeted. Watching the re-formed noodlers thrash away felt like being 16 again -- memories of suburban park parties and bucket bongs springing from nowhere. The band were always better when they eschewed histrionics for straight-ahead pop and so it proved again with a mid-set rendition of the 17-year old 'Sundial'. 'Gyroscope', from 1995's *Galactophonic*, also cut through the chill as did closer 'Daddy Long Legs'. Still, a glaring lack of new material meant the reformed 'Weed' were never going to be anything better than an exercise in (entertaining) self-indulgence.

**Royal Crown Revue** might be more at home on the West Hollywood cocktail circuit, but the eight-strong swing posse can still lay down some passable gangster bop (with the recent addition of ingenue Jennifer Keith) without getting too bogged down in '30s tropes. In their new incarnation as a band for hire RCR kept the kids nodding, 20 years on from their pioneering Warped festival performances. Eddie Nichols might have drunk all his songwriting juice but you couldn't really go wrong with a set of classics including 'Hey Pachucco' and 'Viva Las Vegas'. Keith's numbers dragged on a bit though for the inebriated timeslot.

With energy levels flagging, Portland Electro-duo **Yacht** in karaoke mode were always going to face an uphill battle and the band seemed to know it, displaying their home address (Apartment #4, 4008 N Mississippi Ave) in a bizarre attempt to ingratiate themselves with the locals. It wasn't much help -- even the Vidal Sassoon hipsters stage right struggled to shift their rumps in anything more than a sympathy groove. Nice visuals though.

Enter Beats in Space's **Tim Sweeney**, who turned up carrying what looked like 200 records and preceded to lay down some amazing plates over the course of 90 minutes. I was heading tent-wards at this stage, but the inclusion of a Turtles track appeared to satisfy the crate diggers who *somehow* managed to keep alert until 4am.

## SATURDAY

After not really sleeping, **Kid Sam**'s scratchiness on Saturday morning grated when it may otherwise have intrigued. It was probably just me, but edgy vocals and scratchy drums on the wrong side of midday seemed a terrible fit at the time. Still, 'Down to the Cemetery' still managed to reveal some home truths well before my second coffee had kicked in.

Before I knew it, **Thee Oh Sees** had hopped on stage in a hair-of-the-dog set following an appointment at Billboard the night before. The ragged four piece injected some much-needed menace into a line-up that had until then seemed rather safe -- the sight of John Dwyer tipping beer down his throat while strumming 'Enemy Destruct' an excellent reminder to start preparations for another unhinged arvo. It was a pity they were on this early -- the sound was big enough for a much later mid-afternoon or evening tilt.

After an interminable De La Soul-style soundcheck that drew the attention of an irate stage manager, nasal folk-hoppers **Why?** managed to speed through a rendition of tracks drawn mostly from 2008's *Alopecia* album. The memorable double change-up of 'Fatalist Palmistry' prompted furious head nodding but concluding shoutalong to 'The Hollows' was marred by the drums being way too low in the mix (the sound dude having possibly embarked on a retaliatory sabotage mission). Humorously, vocalist Yoni Wolf had clearly been taking cues from 1990s Pulp videos, recreating a number of patented Jarvis Cocker stage moves. Eight hours before The Messiah was scheduled on stage, it seemed Cocker's spirit had already descended.

Following an agreeable set of rockabilly standards from **Kitty, Daisy and Lewis**, a croaky **Pharaohe Monch** finally provided the day's lifting off point, inciting a mini-riot on 'Simon Says' not seen since the infamous 2004 Hilltop Hoods frenzy. Monch also provided the stand-out giggle of the festival. As crutches and beer spraying around the pit, between-bands DJ and whitest man alive Guy Blackman was roped into the mayhem, even appearing at one point to mouth the refrain "show us your titties" in the direction of Monch's busty backup singer.

By Meredith's half-way point, the yearning for a Gold FM singalong provided so ably at Golden Plains by The Church had reached its nadir. **Paul Kelly** obliged but didn't do much more, with vocal duties on several songs handed over to Vika Bull and Kelly appearing unsure of himself. Still, the Golden Plains raised shoe tradition re-emerged during 2007's 'God Told Me To', directly after which a giant blowup penis almost caused guitarist Ash Naylor to lose the plot completely. When Kelly sang wearily on 'Before Too Long' that he was "at risk of repeating what's happened before in my mind", we knew exactly what he meant. Still, there's nothing better than yodeling the chorus to 'To Her Door' will a belly full of beer as the sun slowly fades.

**Animal Collective** had taken cues from the organic school of live-shows, eschewing single 'My Girls' in favour of an hour long wig-out of the type that works well in a Brooklyn car park but less so in a field that had just sung themselves hoarse. The frustration was evident, not just from the floor but also at the mixing desk, where staff appeared to be rating the bands out of ten next to the list of playing times. For the record, Animal Collective received 4. Kelly? 10.

By this point, I was gagging for a gangly showman to seize control and **Jarvis Cocker** obliged with a pared-back version of his Forum show earlier in the week -- opening with a stomp through 'Angela' and employing his trademark swagger to cover up the disappointing tunes scattered over his last two solo outings. 'Fat Children's' references to Tottenham produced much mirth but even with Pulp bassist Steve Mackey present, there was no chance of a 'Common People', which several car stereos blasted later on in the evening in a show of defiance. 'Don't Let Him Waste Your Time' was the highlight until Cocker stormed back with a great 'Cunts are Still Running the World' -- adding the curious caveat that the targets of his ire were apparently about to redeem themselves at Copenhagen.

Now, it's commendable that local beat-merchants are laid on for the benefit of the inebriated and **Mafia** and **Bag Raiders** did the business with their left field breakdowns. But there was a definite sense that something resembling a Dexter DJ set might have halted the dribble back to the tent. Mafia's unfortunate inclusion of a spliced up 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' didn't help matters, reminding even the heavily medicated of how Girl Talk did it better. Misty rain provided the perfect excuse for the vaunted Meredith laser show, the green droplets proving more interesting than the opening strains of **Nathan Fake**. Time for some shut eye, serenaded by the mysterious Silence Wedge.

## SUNDAY

But the Wedge, with t-shirts on sale this year, failed to live up to expectations -- this correspondent being kept awake by a sermon from a nearby gazebo on the three vortices of Chakra and why soundwaves were the essential building blocks of life. The shrieks from **Kes Band** at the hideous time of 10am only added to the pain.

It took a set of top notch smartarsery from **Wagons** to prevent total internal collapse with Si The Philanthropist's skip-hop anthem 'Tha Bizness' with Henry on drums the standout. Sunday at Meredith is fast becoming a laconic blokefest as Henry Wagons and later Coxy from **the Fauves** apparently keen to follow in Greg Fleet's footsteps. Coxy detailed the Doctor's recent cricket injury in intimate detail but a stellar 'Give Up Your Day Job' was lost in the shit fight to secure a spot to view another farcical Meredith Gift with Sunday MC/pants man Angus Sampson bizarrely likening the competitors to Terry Alderman, Glynis Nunn and veteran walker Kerry Saxby.

By now the end was nigh -- tents were pulled down and car boots slammed shut, the howls of **The Dacios** Linda wafting through the blue gums as the traffic crawled past abandoned couches and contorted chairs. The cynics may be right -- in its 19th year Meredith might be missing some of the magic and characters that once brought it to life. But sometimes, in a good year, the music can still be its own reward.

*Andrew Crook*

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