

Joy Lynn White/ Duane Jarvis
Barrels, Berwick on Tweed
Friday, April 9

Sometimes an audience is captivated by the 'smoke and mirrors' of a performance; the kind of thing we label 'stage presence'. However, at Barrels on Friday, Joy Lynn White and Duane Jarvis largely did away with the need for 'performance' with 26 moments to remember. 'All' they did was sit down and play songs of touching beauty. But what songs and the way they played them was more an invitation to take a glimpse into their lives. Nashville singer-songwriter White began the evening with *Tonight The Heartache's On Me* and *I Doubt If It Does To You*. She instantly turned the newly refurbished and rather chic Barrels cellar into a dusty bar in some even dustier backwater town. The kind of town where dreams are dreamt but never fulfilled, where the love songs are those of unrequited passion or romance that goes wrong. Pain and heartache ran through every line. The fear was that she would be crushed by the weight of her own emotion. Joy Lynn White possesses the kind of voice that could and should make every red-blooded male fall in love with it. There were no barriers. *If You Want My Heart* was written as it felt, and sung with the same honesty. Alongside her, dressed in black, sat Duane Jarvis, a superbly talented writer and performer. That he began with a Chuck Prophet cover was a surprise but *Spread My Soul Too Thin's* menacing malevolence was in sharp contrast to the heartbreaking naiveté of Joy Lynn White. As she remarked at the end 'scary'. But Jarvis is a charming man, a writer of great integrity, and an engaging performer. In fact it was he who leavened proceedings from time to time. The Tex-Mex *Forgive The Fool*, a slightly surreal *Mexican Woodpecker* and the funky *Coulda, Shoulda, Woulda* adroitly lowered the emotional temperature whenever it was in danger of overheating. And yet at the other end of the spectrum he began the second half with the cautionary darkness of *Prodigal Daughter*. Jarvis describes himself as a 'writer who sings'. In truth he does both better than most. The collisions between dark and light in his performance gave a glimpse of a more complex Duane Jarvis. A night in his company would be time well spent. Even though the lion's share of the evening was White's, the pair were like an interlocking joint. Approaching from different directions, the strength came when they joined. Unsurprisingly, most of the music was autobiographical, and *Girls With Apartments in Nashville* was a poignantly told tale of aspirations.

Superficially, Joy Lynn White's hopes and aspirations are relevant to anyone whose youth was spent dreaming. When you listen to a female singer who can inject the raw passion that White put into *Keep This Love*, then you can't help but think back to Janis Joplin. White shares much with the pre-ravaged Joplin. Both put their hearts on the line. And, as with Joplin, you're never quite sure how much of Joy Lynn White's set is the professional musician doing a professional job or how much is catharsis. In truth, we don't know whether the night was driven by unwritten rules or a written set list. So it may have been incongruous in a night of soul-searching country rock to hear Chuck Berry's *Monkey Business*, but it worked. Although, there is still something odd about hearing rock-n-roll being played while sitting down, Jarvis obviously felt the same as he fidgeted in his seat throughout a barnstorming *Happy Town*.

The encore came too soon with a simply superb *So Full of Love*, which brought the curtain down. It was an evening built on the best foundation of all...wonderful music.

Michael Mee