



Vertigo U2 are a 'new' band that only started gigging at the beginning of this year, yet their origins go further back than that with 3 of the 4 band-members formerly working together in the U2 tribute act NEU2. My first introduction to Mark & Craig (and soundman Joe) was over 18 months back when NEU2 played their first ever gig at the Office, which in fact at that time was only their 5th gig together as a band. Their next visit to the venue saw Graeme Wall now instated as their Drummer and this second gig was really where I saw things now gelling together for them. Musically they were getting the true feel of U2's sound and performance, and this was a much better band altogether. But by the late summer / early autumn of last year, the various players felt that their time was over with this particular project. Graeme had left previously in the spring of that year, and the next few months saw Mark, Craig and Joe all depart from NEU2. Whatever their reasons were for doing that is none of my concern, but

collectively their passion for playing the music of U2 had not waned one iota. So it wasn't all that surprising when they announced that they were forming a brand new band that would feature Graeme, Mark & Craig, and with Joe doing the sound once again. The new addition to the line-up was former Tom Sawyer drummer (and multi-instrumentalist) Ian Rogers now concentrating on playing lead guitar with the band. This group were christened Vertigo U2 and from the outset of this year the band have been building up an excellent reputation with a series of well-received shows.

An Office gig was inevitable, and I was delighted was bassist Mark specifically asked to do a show at this venue on St Patrick's Day. This date has been pushed as a showcase for Irish-related music over the last decade, and with U2 being one of the biggest acts ever to have come out of Ireland then a tribute to their music seemed to be a perfect choice for the St Patrick's Day celebrations. Guitarist Ian has very recently has gone through some personal tragedy with the sad passing away of his father, and I honestly thought (and very understandably so) that this show might be pulled. But I was over-the-moon when word got back to me that Ian had made the brave decision to continue on playing with the band after taking a couple of weeks off from gigging. I knew that all of the band were very much looking forward to playing at the venue, and to them it was a nice place to stage a musical comeback for both Ian (he last played here with Tom Sawyer) and for the former members of NEU2 as well. But can I state for the record that this is a NEW band and should only be viewed as just that. I'm not going to make any comparisons to NEU2 as this group is still continuing to perform under that name with a new line-up, and there the references to the past associations with that group will now cease. Vertigo U2 is the name of the new band and this is the act that is getting reviewed in this particular article. And can I start off by saying what a fabulous show these lads put on in the Office on this night.



Problems arose during the sound check when Ian found his amplifier had decided not to work, even though it had been functioning perfectly well when the band had been playing the night beforehand. But luckily I had gotten to the venue early and managed to loan the group my own amp & speaker cabinet in plenty of time for them to get a proper full sound check. The crazy thing is that for the prior evening at the Office, Ruckerfella suffered a similar fate when their guitarist's amp also failed to work (although it actually packed up after just 3 songs in). So my amp was already still in the building, and a quick jaunt out with singer Craig soon brought back my cab so that Ian could perform without any hassle. I was pleased to see the sound check go rather swimmingly well, and Joe their sound engineer did an excellent job for them. The experience he has built up from working with the majority of these lads for so long is really paying off for him now. He's got a good

ear for the music, an instinctive feel for how to achieve the real U2 sound, and more importantly he's got tons of passion for the job at hand. The group couldn't have been in better hands, and Joe (real name is also Mark) made damn sure that the only thing the band had to be concerned about was their own performances. He gave them a very polished & professional mix, leaving the rest of the lads to concentrate on delivering a top-class show.



From the opening distinctive riffs of the self-titled 'Vertigo' this band were off to a blinding start. This was the best I had ever heard them sound collectively, and musically they all seemed to have shot up in my meagre estimation. Firstly Mark on bass had a gorgeous tone coming out of his backline equipment. He proudly showed off his recently acquired Alembic bass guitar to me at the end of the night, and what a stunningly beautiful piece of workmanship it is. The L.E.D.'s that illuminate on the fret-board look fantastic, and the quality of the instrument is absolutely top-notch. But unfortunately Mark later told me that he'll probably be retiring this particular bass from live performances as it simply weighs too heavy to be played for this group's typical 2-hour concerts. But I was well-impressed with the sound from him, and his playing was totally on the money as his provided bass lines were 100% accurate to the original

recordings by U2. Graeme is no slouch either, and even though he is probably better known to many as the drummer from the former AC/DC tribute Back In Black, U2 has always been his personal favourite band. So as such then he now gets to imitate his number one hero, and to see Graeme playing in this band is where you really get to view him in his element. His timing and feel for the music is amazing, and he still manages to give a crack & drive to even the slower tunes. That on top of the marvellous drum mix coming through the PA system made his contribution to the music essential!



Singer Craig has always done a very good job of trying to fill the shoes of the real U2 international superstar Bono, and as the real I-am is such a well known character then any attempt to copy him is going to be scrutinised to the max. Can I just say now that Craig did a magnificent job. He's done well in the past but this time he totally nailed the task. Not only were his vocals richer & deeper with far more tone & expression, but as a front man he came alive too. I've seen him in the past be a little reserved on stage with him concentrating mainly on his vocals rather than giving a visual performance. This time the balance was corrected as Craig moved about on stage far more actively than ever before, and also took a few opportunities to move out in to the audience to sing to them more intimately. The first time he did this was during the atmospheric rendition of the classic 'Bad', and as he sang out the verses of this number he also passed around a bowl of sweets for the audience to help themselves to. This was a lovely little touch that allowed him to familiarise himself with the crowd, and no doubt also pleased the many punters that ended up chewing candy for the rest of the number (and I personally munched on a gorgeous tasting apple cube, yum-yum). But it wasn't the sweeties that won the hearts of this audience, but simply Craig's very believable portrayal of one of rock music's legendary outstanding figures. He sang his heart out and played out the role with real conviction & soul.

And lastly (I was saving the best for last) was guitarist Ian Rogers blowing my initial impressions of him totally out of the water. I'd only ever seen Ian before playing behind a drum kit, and even though he did a damn fine job pulling off Rush drum patterns, he was far more at home in the role of playing The Edge. Not only did he play superbly, but more noticeably was his quirky body movements and obvious enjoyment of being up there on stage. Ian was having a whale of a time, and he delivered a great visual performance that made my eyes constantly drift over towards the left hand side of the stage, even though Craig was putting on an equally riveting show. The final result was that you felt that you were watching a 'band' and not just a collection of individual musicians thrown together. As a unit they really did have a 'team' vibe about them, and it was marvellous to see the band having such a great time being up there on stage. Ian's contributions weren't just good solid guitar playing and dancing about, but he also provided some first-rate backing vocals and occasionally showed off playing keyboards too. He managed to play several keyboard parts throughout the course of the night, but for the 'Unforgettable Fire' then he exclusively remained behind his keyboard for that entire song. The keys added tons of extra texture to the music and allowed this band to play an unlimited selection of classic U2 songs, way beyond what I had even imagined them to be performing live.



Ian's multi-instrumental background has opened up new doors for this outfit, and with him he has brought a fully-rounded understanding of the music plus excellent sequencing skills for setting up the extra sound requirements of certain songs. His active involvement with the music has allowed new dimensions to be explored as to which songs that this group can actually now attempt to cover. So instead of the evening's music being only drum, bass & guitar orientated, you now had the keyboards & sequencing attributes of U2 from the mid 80's onwards also. So the skies were the limit as far as what tracks that Vertigo U2 chose to play, and for this night it was pretty much a greatest hits set. The rockier stuff was still the main choice, but surprising inclusions such as '2 Hearts Beat as One' and 'The Sweetest Thing' absolutely knocked me for six. These were fantastic selections that changed the pace of the music and added a much bigger spectrum to the songs being aired. As for the rest of the set, it was pretty much what you'd expect from a U2 tribute band, and all the fan's favourites were included such as 'With or Without You', 'Desire', 'Pride (In the Name of Love)', as well as really old classics like 'Gloria', 'I Will Follow' and 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'.

The second set was closed with the epic 'Where the Streets have no Name' and the first encore of 'New Year's Day' rounded things off beautifully. The very final encore of '40' left the audience singing along in brilliant form, with the lyrics of "how long" echoing across the room. This was a very well thought-out set list that hit all the marks right on target.

Although this wasn't my first ever sight of these lads on stage, this was my first experience of them under the banner of Vertigo U2 and I was so very impressed with the first-rate show that was given here tonight. This was a strong performance that saw them all reach new heights as musicians individually, but collectively as a band they really scored top marks by putting on a very entertaining show. Craig impressed the f**k out of me by finally becoming a very good front man, as well as pushing his vocals abilities up another good notch too. But my man-of-the-match award has to go to Ian who fascinated me with his jiggling about on stage, and yet still ended up providing so much towards this group's overall sound. His backing vocals, keyboards and sequencing all enhanced the dynamics of this band to make them sound really full & rich. His involvement has certainly pushed the rest of the musicians in to allowing them to explore new territories, and the avenues that have been opened up have made the back catalogue of U2 fully available to be covered. Vertigo U2 are still a new band with less than 10 weeks of gigging under their belts, yet they did enough on this night to take me by surprise by delivering a great show at such an early stage of their career together. As far as I can see Vertigo U2 ARE GO!

