



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

SPOON'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO EUGENE

Lanky to the point of gawkiness, Spoon frontman Britt Daniel is an unlikely rock star. Offstage, his sideways grin reads less rakish and more boyish, his tousled hair not so much sensual as plainly messy.

Since the mid-'90s, Spoon has made pop rock slightly too intellectual for mass consumption, remaining mere degrees from the mainstream — the sort of whip-smart pop that, in a just world, mainstream markets ought to embrace.

This works for Spoon. Indie rock, after all, is a safe haven for misfits, intellectuals and outcasts.

When Daniel took the stage at Eugene's McDonald Theatre Jan. 13, the role of conventional rock singer came natural to him: the posturing, the push-me-pull-me physicality, the edge of recklessness, dropping to his knees at just the right moment. The exuberant audience ate it up. The place was packed. He's a showman.

Throughout the night, Spoon worked through several of their almost-hits ("I Turn My Camera On") and many tunes off their latest slightly synth-pop *Hot Thoughts*. They managed interesting live arrangements of their most familiar songs.

I've always heard a bit of soul and R'n'B in Spoon, like Elvis Costello covering The Supremes. And when they struck up "The Underdog" off 2007's terrific *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*, I leaned to my friend and said, "This is a great Billy Joel tune."

I thought the set lost steam with some extended electronic interludes and a pure psych-rock freak-out that overstayed its welcome. Daniel and his band are terrific songwriters who make interesting and nuanced decisions in the studio; live, that all gets a bit drowned out by the rock show spectacle, showmanship and muscular bravado.

Unfortunately, opener Kentucky-based garage-rock act White Reaper had to bail, stuck somewhere in bad weather. Portland art-rockers Lithics stepped in. I'm a big fan of Lithics, and I rushed from an earlier engagement to catch their set but I missed it. I won't make that mistake again. Check 'em out.

Last time Spoon came to town, so did Conan O'Brien. In fact, Spoon ended up guesting as O'Brien's musical guest, which delayed their McDonald Theatre set. By the time the show started, the crowd at McDonald was thin and the whole thing had the feeling of an after-party for the blockbuster show just up the street.

So it was nice to have Spoon back, owning the night, playing a proper headlining set — where they belong. — *Will Kennedy*

W.O.W. HALL

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