



The Cinerama John Peel
Session - January 2002 -
as seen by Louise Hume

View from the Balcony

18.30 Brighton Station. It's four-and-a-half hours before Cinerama 'appear' live on the John Peel show on BBC Radio One and I'm clutching the letter that says I've won a place in the invited audience. Am I overdoing it? It says we've got to be there at 9.30pm and, in theory, it's only a fifty minute journey. Ian, the lucky friend I've carefully chosen to accompany me obviously thinks so, because he still hasn't arrived at the station.

I spy a group of dishy students outside W.H. Smith and just as I'm wondering whether I should invite one of them to come with me instead, I suddenly see what appears to be a packhorse weighed down by a big purple block trotting towards me. It's Ian.

He's wearing three jumpers and is carrying a bar of Cadbury's chocolate that is so big that we'll probably have to buy it its own ticket.

"I've heard recording studios are freezing," he says. He then strokes the chocolate defensively. "And they might make us sit around and wait for ages so we'll probably need something to do to pass the time..."

20.10 As the train trundles niftily into Victoria, we wonder what the catch with this Cinerama session will be. Being part of an invited audience to watch your favourite band on your favourite radio show for free (or, at least, for getting a question right) is too good to be true, isn't it?

Maybe the band will whiz their way through a couple of songs while a bloke appears with a sign that says 'CLAP!' or 'WHOOOP NOW!'

Maybe we won't actually get to see the band at all. Maybe they'll be in a separate room, disguised under wires and gadgets.

Maybe we'll be 'kept' in a freezing back room until they need us to shout a bit. We've heard plenty of sessions on the John Peel show and they always sound exciting, but... well... you can do all sorts with technology these days, can't you?



The 'Daughters of Death' in action during the Peel Session. Photo by Darren Bugg



David pictured during the Peel Session. Photo by Darren Bugg

21.20 We realise that the low, brown, very un-rock 'n' roll building that we've walked past several times in our search for the Maida Vale studios are, in fact, the Maida Vale studios! For the last half-hour we've presumed it's a municipal leisure centre.

Inside, the tiny reception area is crowded with people and the atmosphere is tense, hushed and filled with expectation. It feels like we're waiting for an en-masse dental appointment. I can't help noticing that no one else appears to have quite so many clothes or as much chocolate as we do.



The string section rehearse with David at a rehearsal room in South London before the Peel Session. (L-R: Rachel Davies, Eleanor Gilchrist, Sarah Harris, Abigale Trundle). Photo by Sally Murrell

21.29 Despite being told that it will start at 9.30pm, I decide that now is a good time to look for the bathroom. A security guard, more interested in a football match involving Chelsea on a screen under the counter, grunts “S’over there, love,” and points in a vague easterly direction. I find myself lost for the next ten minutes in the dark and deserted BBC canteen, trying to find my way back. Enjoyable as it is to ponder on the musical greats who must have tucked into their pie and chips at these very tables, I’m starting to worry that this will be the sum total of my evening’s entertainment.

Just in time, a stray security guard appears. He seems to think that I’m nicking some of the individual sachets of tomato sauce and I’m catapulted out just in time to join a line of people who are being led, conga-style, through a series of corridors and rooms. It’s all getting a bit like Alice in Wonderland.

21.40 We’ve arrived in a cavernous room, which, with its high ceiling, large space, chrome balcony, settees and subdued lighting, appears to be part car show room, part wine bar circa 1988. Must be the right place, though, as a group of individuals who look remarkably like members of Cinerama are standing around, doing things with musical instruments.

21.55 No sooner have we taken up position on the balcony, than we're welcomed by John Peel himself. "I'm crap at this sort of thing," he says. Minutes later we hear him complain to his radio audience that we stared at him with 'marginal interest'. Maybe we're just shy. It's all very new.

Will the microphones pick up every word we say? Will we be sharing our 'Where do you come from?' type of conversations with the rest of the UK? Do we need to whisper like this? Is everyone else, like me, slightly unnerved by this voice on the radio suddenly developing a human form in front of our eyes? "Is John Peel really tall or is it the room that's small?" Ian wonders aloud.

Then, as if by magic, a crate of beer arrives on the balcony. A man with a bottle-opener on his key ring suddenly becomes very popular, although I'm sure that there'll be a few Cinerama fans walking around with strange ridges at the sides of their mouths for a long time to come.

22.15 The show is piped through the studio and we're all happily passing the time by spying on the band, who continue to go about their business seemingly unperturbed by being in what is effectively a large fishbowl. They all look scrumptious - David cutting a dash in black and white, with Sally, clad all in black.

Terry and Simon, meanwhile, lounge around on chairs at the side, looking cool and popstar-esque, like extras from the Ferrero Rocher advert.

On the balcony, the 20 or so audience members are all a bit... well... male. So where are all the girls, I wonder. What about the 'Boys like rock; Girls like pop' theory that Leigh Hunt wrote about in the last Orange Slices? I think of the several male friends I have who say Cinerama are "yeah, alright, I s'pose" but then suspiciously know the words to every song.

Several of us are dicing with death by leaning precariously over the high balcony to read the set lists, which someone has spotted, sellotaped to the floor. It's difficult to read with the blood rushing to your head (Is that 'Wow' or 'Mom'?) but it looks as if we're in for a treat with old Wedding Present classics rubbing shoulders with some tantalising titles we've never heard of. The set also appears to be heart-warmingly long. Ian takes off at least two jumpers and parks the chocolate in a corner.

22.30 John Peel is introducing the band to a nationwide audience. Tonight they'll be assisted by a string quartet. Are they really called 'The Daughters of Death' or is it just his little joke? And then, without further ado, the band slide straight into a sublime new song: 'Cat Girl Tights'.



John Peel shows David a play list from his days as a DJ on pirate radio in the 1960s, just before the start of the Cinerama Peel Session. Photo by Darren Bugg

This is a real after-dark song - and surely a contender for most intriguingly titled song of the year. Dunno about tights, but it's certainly very cat-like, with the melody tiptoeing around teasingly before bounding on to our knee and giving our ears a huge lick. "He looks as if he means it," Ian whispers as David sings "I'm not one of the things that you left behind," with his eyes screwed up.

At the end everyone claps heartily, even though the blokes with 'CLAP!' signs haven't materialised. It occurs to me that we're seeing a whole new side to the band. Perched on the balcony above them, most of us enjoy a strange aerial view of David. Occasionally, we see a glimpse of Sally's hand.

Terry and Simon are tucked away by the stairs and drummer Kari - although it certainly sounds as if he's in the building somewhere - is completely invisible to us!

The second song is a further exploration of the world of womanly wrongdoings and ups the tempo slightly, being: 'And When She Was Bad'. On the balcony, we're starting to feel at home. Some people are gently swaying or tapping the handrail with their fingers. This is good! After all, it's just like a regular gig...only with a better view of the tops of the band members' heads.

After 'Your Time Starts Now', David admits that he's also feeling weird. "I've been in this room so many times," he tells us, almost losing his headphones as he attempts to gain eye-contact, "but I've never had all these people up there looking down on me!"

He then reveals he's suffering from a bad cold this evening, before gamely soldiering on with old favourite 'Après Ski' without a Lemsip or tub of Vicks in sight. A further frisson of excitement erupts when John Peel is spotted lurking in a doorway just behind the band. Maybe they should get him to loiter behind David at other concerts. It sort of suits them.

22.50... and the band is regaling us with more new material. This time a song called 'Starry Eyed', performed tonight for the first time in front of a live audience. This one sees David back where we like him best - in 'loser in love' mode.



**Terry - all dressed in black.
Photo by Darren Bugg**

It lulls us into a false sense of security with a lovely tinkly keyboard beginning before a massive guitar-heavy chorus comes along to kick our asses.

As usual, Cinerama are going where other bands fear to tread, as they shine a light on those uncomfortable corners of relationships we don't like to acknowledge. You know how, when you're going out with someone, you always try to act cool around the subject of 'still being friends with exes' whereas really, the whole thing secretly makes you as insecure as hell? Well, this song is for you.

Meanwhile on the balcony, the gentle swaying is turning into some out and out jumping up and down. Ian almost falls through the gap in the balcony. I imagine him crash-landing in front of the string quartet, giving a whole new meaning to 'The Daughters of Death'.

"And then the band will have to stop playing and they're only half way through," I warn him. "What a way to go, though," he replies, happily.

22.55 After this slice of cutting edge Cinerama, we're catapulted into the past by an old Wedding Present favourite 'Suck'. "I'm often castigated for writing saucy lyrics in Cinerama," David says by way of introduction. "Well, here's one I wrote ten years ago and this is very saucy, so it's not a new thing." Well, fancy that! And I always thought it was about the perils of drinking through a straw.

Afterwards, David admits the real reason for "sticking a Wedding Present song in" is 'economic'; you see, it frees Sally up to do a bit of guitar-tuning, hence saving on the cost of a roadie. As a fellow Yorkshire person, this is good Northern common sense that I can appreciate.

Then it's time for another new song, 'Get Up and Go'. A few seconds in, I think it's going to be my favourite Cinerama song ever.



Sally - also all dressed in black!
Photo by Darren Bugg

A few more seconds and... it's just my favourite song ever! Again the action takes place in the familiar Cinerama territory of a bedroom.

This time, it's the morning after the night before. He's waking up happily, thinking that it's the beginning of something fantastic. She sees it differently, however. In fact, there's something she hasn't told him... yet. Come on down, that ever-popular Cinerama/TWP character, the 'Absent Boyfriend' - to dash our hero's hopes against the tangled sheets.

And all this comes to light via an ill-timed text message. Could this be the first song in the history of music to reveal the sinister underbelly of text messaging, I wonder?

We're given no time to muse on the sad workings of fate, however, because David is already tearing at full speed into the line "When you said you had nothing on beneath that dress..." and we're plunged into seaside postcard naughtiness with new single 'Quick, Before It Melts', which unleashes that delightfully wanton line "I don't wear underwear because it leaves a stripe..."

Another candidate for intriguing title of the year, perhaps? As the song thunders on into further laddishness (think stag-nights, think beer, think men in vests). I wonder what exactly 'it' is? I'm sure this isn't exactly what David had in mind, but I can't help thinking about our industrial sized bar of chocolate in the corner.

23.03 Time for another TWP fave. This time 'Spangle' which fits neatly into the set, being, as David explains, more like a Cinerama song anyway. Before it starts, David complains that we're all "very, very quiet." Maybe it's because we're so high up, it sometimes feels that we're the ones on show and the band have come to watch us!



**Simon Cleave patiently waits for the start of the Peel Session.
Photo by Darren Bugg**

Earlier I overheard someone say that it was just like watching them play in someone's living room!

Maybe the dilemma, then, is that we don't know whether we should be applauding the band or offering them a nice cup of tea and a custard cream. Still, "very, very quiet" is fighting talk, especially for the woman next to me who has been whooping for England since before the band even came on. Everyone rises to the occasion, shouting and clapping with gusto.



Kari, Terry and Simon take a break backstage before the start of the Session. Photo by Darren Bugg

Ian gets carried away and makes an odd, high-pitched noise that sounds like a sheep being strangled. David bemusedly enquires about the nature of the sound. "Is that an animal?" He asks before moving swiftly on.

The next one, new song 'Estrella' is one great big, glammed-up, hair sprayed, lipsticked, false-eyelashed song. It's a nice change to find that the man's the cad in this song. The tune's so big and sexy that it transports us into a Jamesbondian universe of secrets missions and shiny hair. I can almost see speedboats, Vogue covers and diamante ear-rings.

Why don't Cinerama ever get asked to do a James Bond theme, I wonder. If Simon LeBon can lurk shiftily around the Eiffel Tower, I'm sure David can as well.

23.15 Time for 'Wow!' and, after a surreal moment in which David says he feels like Gladys Knight, we're launched into one of the Cinerama fans' favourite songs.

23.20 The last song is appropriately 'Health and Efficiency' - number 3 in John Peel's recent 'Festive Fifty' chart. I'm going to make an unpopular confession now: this song never quite managed to win a place in my heart. I can appreciate that it's very skilful and clever and all that, but it's just a bit too polite and, well, *nice* for me.

Tonight, the song has a harder edge. Maybe it's because of where we're standing. Maybe David's cold is really starting to get the better of him, but the words sound less gentle, the memories sound more bad than sad. The guitars in the chorus soar over us like tidal waves and I don't think I've ever heard the word 'peaches' sound so evil.

This time, the song has a decidedly bitter and bad-tempered streak and its place in my heart has been finally won. The applause is rapturous.

23.25 And that's the end. Or is it? John Peel summons the band back because 'Andy the Engineer' says there's time for more. Apparently, Peel had played some records at the wrong speed earlier on the show, hence the extra time for Cinerama!

This is fine by us, of course. Particularly when we hear it's going to be 'Brassneck'. From that lovely snide peel of guitars at the beginning, I can tell everyone's thinking the same thing as me: "I must blow the dust off that old vinyl copy of 'Bizarro' when I get home."

From the first line: "You know I sent you that letter" to the closing statement: "I don't love you any more," it still sounds as fresh as a daisy - or at least as fresh as the moment someone said to you: "sorry, you're dumped," for the first time.

23.27 It's the end again. But, no! John really thinks that the band should come back and do 'Your Charms'. "You really ought to," he urges. This is obviously an important song for him because, as we are about to learn, Peel himself inspired it.

"When I was a lad," he explains "Songs had no sexual references. People just sang about yearning for somebody's 'charms'. I used to wonder what these charms were and where they were located! Growing up, it was all very confusing and not at all helpful. So I challenged David to write a song about these charms." The rest, as they say, is history.

And just when we thought a Gedge song existed with absolutely no sexual content!

23.30 Although we all hope that John Peel will find yet another excuse to call the band back, this time it really is the end.

We all come down from the dizzy heights of the balcony. Various members of the band are lingering. Ian can't resist David's proximity to inform him that he looks a bit tired and asks whether he's put any serious thought into going on holiday in the near future. Probably one of David's more unusual post gig questions, but he fields it expertly.

I ask him why he thinks the audience tonight were mainly male. He replies that the question we had to answer to win a place at the gig was so hard, that only 'die-hard' fans (who are usually male) would have known it. (Since the answer was on page 20 of the last 'Orange Slices', I'd say it was good old-fashioned female common sense that helped me, rather than any male anorak tendencies!)

But by now it's already midnight - the time that Brighton trains turn into pumpkins. So after a few rushed goodbyes, we go home to relive it all again in that warm glow of post-gig bliss, while finding out whether it's humanly possible to eat a kilogram of chocolate before dawn.

Louise Hume