

FRI 25

Roni Size/Reprazent/William Goodchild/ The Emerald Ensemble/Speech Debele

● In what appears to be the most prescient support slot booking ever, **Speech Debele** takes the stage at Colston Hall just days after winning the Mercury Music Prize. Unfortunately, her much-anticipated performance is something of a let-down. Neither her voice nor her songs seem strong enough to hold the audience's attention and by the time her set ends the majority of the crowd are already deeply engrossed in their own conversations. Nobody seems sure of what to expect from the collaboration between **Roni Size** and **William Goodchild**, although judging by the rush to the stage when the Emerald Ensemble launch into the euphoric intro, they're evidently hoping for something special. It quickly becomes clear that their hopes are about to be exceeded. Roni Size's synths and beats are as dirty as ever, but Goodchild's string and horn arrangements sit comfortably within them, lifting the dark driving rhythms into something euphonious while Dynamite MC and vocalist Onallee whip the crowd into a frenzy. Both old and new tracks are aired, but even old favourites like 'Brown Paper Bag' sound fresh given the Emerald treatment. It's an incredible display, and one that leaves the musicians onstage as happy and exhilarated as the sweating, dancing audience. (Jay Chakravorty)

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DreamState

● Inside Bristol's latest chic European airport in the near-total blackout and sweltering heat of the second Colston Hall a very mixed bag of music is on offer, some of it pretty dreadful. **The Balky Mule** please us with their square peg pop, gruff guitars, and louche jazzy kit. "How do you say goodnight?" they ask. Belgium's **Ignatz** on the smaller second stage curiously elects to sing through his guitar amp, rendering every word incomprehensible and sounding like he's shouting into a pillow. His dreary guitar looping and hideously muffled distortion tones demonstrate a shocking tin ear and we really appear to be in his bedroom. Everybody has now sat down or stretched out for **Chris Forsyth's** molten lava layered fretwork. It's that loop pedal again, waves of guitar like the ecstatic din conjured by Flowers/Corsano duo. It's good muscular stuff. Against a projected backdrop of scary clowns (all the films tonight are uniformly excellent, but sitting in the wrong place does induce Guantanamo-style torture migraines) **Ice Bird Spiral** conjure circuit-bent nightmares from abstract processed noise and a child's plastic violin. One's got the good mask, a white antlered death skull, the other has adapted a skirt from Top Shop. Industrial-

strength invocations to Lovecraft's Cthulhu follow. It's bracing stuff and goes on far too long. **Headfall's** twin clarinet assault is cheerfully under-rehearsed, another band that don't appear to have ever been on a stage before. The welcome arrival of some brass warms up their skeletal hesitancy and it starts to sound less like occupational therapy and more like The Feelies at their most adorable. **Silver Pyre's** swarms of looped E-Bow, tinkling temple bells and accordion initially suggest David Byrne has written another score for a New York ballet company but lyrics about shaman and self-elevation quickly unmask them as Goa hippies with a laptop. **ES** promises 30 minutes of chopped and diced church organ panned relentlessly backwards and forwards in hypnagogic waves. After 10 minutes he brings on his wheelie suitcase and starts packing up. Sadly, **Gravenhurst**, a reliable purveyor of quality entertainment, aren't on until midnight, way past Venue's train time. (Kid Pensioner)

SAT 26

Invada Invasion

● As something of a Kitemark in Bristol's left-leaning rock scene, it's fitting Geoff 'Portishead' Barrow's Invada label should helm the city's tastiest feast of experimentalist delights since Venn's sad demise. **Thought Forms** immediately blitz apprehensiveness over Colston Hall's brand spanking foyer suiting decibel-loaded sonic attacks, their majestic post-rock sweeps filling the space to its vertigo-inspiring ceilings. Upping the grandiose stakes in the main hall, mischievous noise tyke **Team Brick** abuses the **Emerald Ensemble's** backing, though oddly, he appears largely a curious bystander to his own set. Sporadically assaulting a bass drum and cymbal as an off-key mini-choir animate his twisted world, Mr Brick departs, flicking the audience two fingers.

Subsequent orchestral additions to **Joe Volk** and **Crippled Black Phoenix** somehow suck life from their respective plaintive folk and expansive yet plodding prog-dusted rock, so we decamp to 'Hall 2' (the old bar) for **Rosie Red Rash's** initially ballsy thrills. Over-reverence towards The Slits and an overall unpolished air soon sullies rousing femme-punk spirit, sadly.

Criticism takes a hiatus when three-headed Roman jazz-metal hydra **Zu** detonate the Foyer, however, a mighty hour focusing on latest record 'Carboniferous' that knocks all present back a step. The Italians' incredible rhythm section is bettered only by Luca T Mai's monstrous saxophone acrobatics, twisting gut-wrenching heaviness into fearless new shapes at every turn.

After that, **Zun Zun Equi's** carnival-starting mathrobeat is rendered a touch tame in Hall 2, by which point headliners **Mogwai** are already levelling the main hall.

It's a by-numbers set by the seasoned Scots' sky-scraping standards, but few post-rock peers rival eardrum-busting epics like closer 'Batcat'.

Pity poor **Fuzz Against Junk**, whose intriguing hippyish multi-instrumentalism clashes with Mogwai, ensuring their Foyer crowd is depressingly sparse. **Gonga's** crushing psychedelia fares better, although failing equipment undermines enjoyment a tad. Our cue to dash back to the foyer for the concluding party that is **Fuck Buttons**. The Bristol-birther duo are on electric form that not even a direct hit from unidentified flying food thrown by some simpleton can derail, deconstructing box-fresh beauties from upcoming second album 'Tarot Sport' with entranced vigour. Now, about making this an annual fixture, Mr Barrow... (Adam Anonymous)

SUN 27

Bristol Uncovered

● Early on it's thin on the ground. People are perched on coloured cubes sporadically clumped round the foyer, but, of course, for Bristol's ever-present front row head-banger, Jeff. **Babel** charm the early-bird afternoon audience with their signature countrified, open plains, big sky sounds. Danny Coughlan's voice and the string trio swoop together, birds of prey, while the drums rollick along, and the result's so good the band have to dance too. In Hall 2, Paul Bradley keeps inviting friends onstage – members past and present of Midnight Brothers, Me, and Spiro – to collaborate with **Organelles** in a "shapeshifting" set of conceptual grooves and heartfelt recollections – songs rich with Bradley's life experiences and the musicianship of the 11 rotating band members. Next up is an altogether different listening experience; as **Mississippi Witch** strike their first chords in the foyer, mums concerned for their children's ears drag their blinking offspring outside. Their mammoth electric fuzz fills the atrium as guitar, bass, and drums hammer away at a scuzzed-up formula that's not exactly new, but a good one. They're like a Kings of Leon not suitable for radio, and they make the beer on the table vibrate like an approaching Jurassic Park T-Rex. Though next up is one woman, alone onstage with her piano, she could give her predecessors a run for their volume with just her voice. Sitting shoeless at her keyboard, **Daisy Chapman** uses her dizzying lung capacity to belt her way through haunting narrations about killing her father and stalking her neighbour. Give her a loop pedal and she'll effortlessly whip up a whole self-made choir to woo and spook. And by the time the last acts on the last night of ten days of celebrations take the stage, the foyer is hopping with people acting like the party's just starting. (Kristen Grayewski)