



An Hour in the Lo-Fi Church with Lael Neale

The disciples gathered for a night they won't soon forget

Photographer: Nicolaj Roos

I got there early. The room was sparsely populated, with just a few people milling about. A merch table stood to the right of the stage, stacked with copies of Neale's latest vinyl and small paintings she'd made herself. About an hour later, after the last note had faded, Neale and Blakeslee were behind the table personally handling sales. The line quickly grew long, and a quick scan revealed that about 90% of those queueing were men.

As you might expect, the crowd was largely made up of young, neatly turned-out indie types. Support came from Danish outfit SSSIV, who delivered a pleasant but ultimately forgettable set.

Front and centre on stage was an Omnichord—no surprise there—which Neale leaned on heavily during the first half of the show, often using it as a rhythm instrument in place of an acoustic guitar.

When the pair finally appeared, immaculately dressed for the occasion, there was no doubt something special was about to happen. Neale, with a deep-red hollow-body guitar and a '70s Fender Twin Reverb, and Blakeslee at her side, had the look of indie rock lifers before a single note rang out.

They opened with *Sleep Through the Long Night*, just Neale's voice and the Omnichord. Somehow, the mood felt both hushed and casual at the same time. Between songs, aside from a low drone of ambient pause music, there was a kind of reverent silence—you could have heard a pin drop.

Blakeslee, playing left-handed à la Paul McCartney, was surrounded by a small forest of gear—eleven pedals, by my count—probably essential for recreating the record's sound. He even worked a tambourine with his left foot, troubadour-style, while playing guitar.

Neale's vocals throughout were treated with a classic Elvis/Lennon slapback echo, which occasionally made her between-song banter a little hard to follow. The momentum was also dented by a fair bit of time spent tuning guitars between numbers.

Still, when she did talk, Neale's offbeat observations hit home. At one point she held up her water carton and asked, "Has anyone noticed they've started fastening the caps so you can't take them off?" A chorus of voices replied: "ANNOYIIIIING!" "What's the point?" she asked, only for someone to yell back, "So it doesn't end up in the ocean." Neale nodded, promising never to complain about it again. "I figured they just thought we couldn't keep track of them," she laughed.

Standing right under a speaker, I occasionally found the upper mids a bit harsh, but otherwise the sound was spot-on. They captured the essence of the album well, even if some of the magic and lo-fi textural quirks of the record were missing—hardly surprising, given that it's near impossible to recreate the grit of a four-track cassette machine in a live room.

The live "Wild Waters" was a highlight—what it may have lacked in lo-fi intimacy, it made up for in sheer, unfiltered energy. Towards the end of the set, they dropped in a gorgeous cover of the Paris Sisters' "What Am I To Do", which fit seamlessly into their world. One request from the floor for "Electricity" went unanswered, but most of the current fourth album was well represented.

Neale was magnetic throughout, vocally and in her presence. With conviction and clear joy, she and Blakeslee delivered every track, and the crowd responded in kind. Word is, the last time Neale played Denmark, the audience was modest in size. This time, though there was still that faint air of "we're a secret society and Lael Neale is our little secret," the room was packed to the rafters.



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