



[Lloyd Cole Small Ensemble](#) @ [\(RNCM\)](#)

Reviewed by [Dave Porter](#) October 2010

If these are tough times for most of us, they are particularly so for musicians. To finance his latest album, Lloyd Cole asked 1,000 fans to each pay \$45 each up front – and they duly came forward.

At his Manchester gig, Cole never missed a chance to plug the album and encourage people to buy a copy on the night, even promising to come out after the show and “sign absolutely anything”.

Tough times indeed to make a living. He needn't worry, though; Cole has a loyal and solid fan base who have stayed with him since the big hits of the Commotions days. It was a pretty near sell-out show and he was treated with silent reverence by the crowd.

If anything this was a problem. There were no rock and roll moments and the one time when Lloyd and the crowd got excited – Cole even issuing a ‘whoop’ – was during the encore. Cole was his usual laconic self but the gig had a subdued feel to it.

Caveats aside, there was a lot to savour. The country-hued new album, Broken Record, was given a good airing, standout performances being Writers’ Retreat! and Man Overboard, both testament to his evident song-writing skills.

His back catalogue is plump with hits: Perfect Skin, Forest Fire and Brand New Friend were all greeted with delight, even though they were presented stripped back to acoustic guitars.

Cole has always been inspired by Americana, early songs including references to Norman Mailer and George Jones. Having lived in the States for the best part of 20 years, he is fully naturalised in every respect and his country and drawl in songs about Baltimore no longer sound as if they come from a well-read undergraduate.

No longer constrained by a major record label, Cole has built himself a one-man industry around his music and there’s every reason to think – like other survivors of the 80s such as Tracey Thorn and Billy Bragg – that he will be around for a lot longer.

And if that means he carries on delivering albums of deliberately thoughtful songs, then that's our gain.