

# CHRISTEENE

## The Lion The Witch And The Cobra

**Start time:** 8pm

**Running time:** 75 minutes, no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

**Martin Aston discusses the genius of CHRISTEENE with creator Paul Soileau, guest and fan John Grant and the star herself.**

What scenario might involve a lion, a witch and a cobra?

The roots of this animalistic trinity lie in a thrilling, taboo-testing performance artist and equally unique and headstrong singer-songwriter, two very different forces of nature that nevertheless share a fierce commitment to resist patriarchal domination and gender conformity, and to call out hypocrisy and intolerance.

The performance artist in question is CHRISTEENE, born in the deep recesses of Austin, Texas's queer nightlife, a witch of sorts with an unusually penetrative litany of spells loaded with candidly sexual and scatological energy. Since 2010, she has released two albums, *Waste Up, Kneez Down* (2012) and *Basura* (2018) and a string of music videos, such as 'Fix My Dick', 'Tears From My Pussy' and 'Butt Muscle', self-composed slices of taut, gristly electronic pop over which CHRISTEENE raps her stanky, sleazy odes. Live shows follow suit, in the company of male dancers T Gravel and Dawg Elf, and occasionally butt plugs inside balloons that float over the audience. For those that feel homonormative culture is as limited and predictable as heteronormative, CHRISTEENE's your gal.

The singer-songwriter in question is Sinead O'Connor, though she now goes by Shuhada Sadaqat since converting to Islam in 2018 (her Twitter handle embraces both names). Born in County Dublin, she released her debut album *The Lion And The Cobra* in 1987 when she was nineteen and heavily pregnant. The album title came from Psalm 91:13 – 'you will tread upon the lion and cobra...' – which inferred that nothing will harm you if you believe in God, an assumption that O'Connor has persistently challenged with critiques of organised religion.

This is the record that CHRISTEENE will perform tonight for the very first time. 'The album speaks to me in the way the bird in my throat whispers about this fucked-up world we live in,' she declares. 'It's only right to burn my insides out in front of the room, with the heat of this woman's spirit. I can focus on Sinead's anger and aggression. But one note that she has played through her entire body of work is a search for love – a fearlessness to express love.'

For the lowdown on CHRISTEENE's insides, and what brought her to this juncture, she defers to Paul Soileau, a native of Louisiana who lived in New Orleans until Hurricane Katrina forced him out, first to Austin and currently New York.

'If it wasn't for Katrina, there would be no CHRISTEENE,' he vouches. 'It makes you realise how positive things can come out of awful places and times. And the world is currently in a very dark place. But it's happened before, this patriarchal society we're stuck with. CHRISTEENE's core is confronting and exposing that realm, and bringing people together to fight those damaging our livelihood, our planet, our children. But I'm tired of the same ways that we discuss things and see it reported in the news. Everyone is compartmentalised in what party they're in, what religion, race and sex. I want to create these rooms where all that bullshit doesn't matter.'

Hence a political protest that includes butt plugs. 'CHRISTEENE talks a lot about the asshole!' Soileau acknowledges. 'Everyone in the room is equal: we have one and you shit out of it. We eat other people's shit in the news, all covered in sugar, so we might as well take the shit she's giving you too.'

The 'shit' that CHRISTEENE is giving the Barbican includes her dancers, a band led by Peter Stopschinski and two special guests: fellow outspoken queer renegades Peaches and John Grant. CHRISTEENE has toured with Peaches, 'and she's my sister. She's taught me a lot.' As for John Grant, 'the lyrics and topics he throws down, and how he delivers his feelings, is unlike anyone I have heard.'

Grant, whose second solo album *Pale Green Ghosts* featured Sinead on back-up vocals, returns the love. 'CHRISTEENE, like Sinead, is my friend and I love her work, the dope electro morsels with lyrics I can relate to, and nice hairy booties to view.'

*The Lion And The Cobra* lyrics that CHRISTEENE especially relates to, that drove Sinead to a place where she shaved all her hair off include 'Drinks Before The War': 'So stop talking of war / Cause you know we've heard it all before / Why don't you go out there / And do something useful.' 'That's so big,' says Soileau, 'and exactly how I feel

barbican

right now. There is so much fire that comes out of my fucking hole!' 'Never Get Old' is another favourite, especially '*Sun setting on the avenue / Everyone walks by / They live their life under cover / Being blind*' – 'That taps into a message CHRISTEENE sends out all the time. But every song is close to my soul.'

Soileau lets CHRISTEENE have the final word. 'I hope everyone has the courage and ability to not let the powers that be keep them contained in a predictably organised box, to live and die by. There are great mysteries to explore out there in this world, great souls in this world to find, and I hope this show we are doing will give them a little drop of courage they need, or reinforce the strength they already have. I played in Austin recently, and a woman – who told me she had children waiting at home, and a job to go to – she took a butt plug home, she dosed it in soap and scrubbed it first, and then took a picture of me and the butt plug. She was so confused and yet excited as to why she had to take that thing home, and I think that pretty much sums it up!'

## Performers

The Band

**CHRISTEENE** lead vocals

**Kerri Atwood** backing vocals

**Roddy Bottum** keys

**Viva DeConcini** lead guitar

**Mary Feaster** bass guitar

**Rachel 'Spanky' Fuhrer** drums

**Peter Stopschinski** keys, musical director

The Boyz

**Thomas Graves** T GRAVEL

**Silky Shoemaker** DAWG ELF

The Cobras

**Eos Counsell** violin

**Anna Phoebe** violin

**Laurie Anderson** viola

**Klara Schumann** cello

The Special Guests

**Peaches**

**John Grant**

Gaelic translation by Lisa Connell

Lighting design by Nigel Edwards

Choreography by Thomas Graves, Silky Shoemaker, Paul Soileau

Costume design by Lee Benjamin and Paul Soileau

BABEL collection face masks from Rick Owens

Music videos directed by PJ Raval and Matt Lambert

Artwork by Katerina Jebb

PR support from Amanda Freeman PR

The Lion and the Cobra written by Sinéad O'Connor

Production Assistant Fergus Daly

Produced by Kamal Ackarie for Sleeper Cell Productions

Presented by the Barbican



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