

Nadine Shah

Live from the Barbican

Start time: 8pm

Approximate running time: 60 minutes, no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.
This performance is subject to government guidelines

Nadine Shah Talks to Arwa Haider as she prepares to perform her latest album, *Kitchen Sink*, live for the first time.

'It's so long since I wrote this bloody thing, and I haven't played it live, ever,' exclaims Nadine Shah, with a generous guffaw. The north-eastern singer-songwriter/musician is referring to her fourth album, *Kitchen Sink* (the follow-up to 2017's Mercury Prize-nominated *Holiday Destination*), which was released in June 2020, when the pandemic had indefinitely paused the gig scene. *Kitchen Sink's* splendid, scathing, richly emotive material rightly won widespread acclaim; tonight's long-awaited performance finally brings it to a live audience – both on site, and via a livestream.

'I'm so excited that it's going to be at the Barbican, because if we're going to play it in one place from start to finish, it had better be somewhere fancy – it has to have a lovely home!' grins Shah. 'It's a real luxury having this much time to plan a gig; you never normally get that. So we're going to get it sounding great. We're going to go all out and make it look like a real spectacle, including costume and visuals.'

Certain aspects of *Kitchen Sink* evoke past decades, including its title, and the hyper-saturated artwork (inspired by Shah's keen appetite for the Twitter account *70s Dinner Party*). At the same time, there's an intensely modern resonance to the album's themes of societal expectations and hypocrisies, spiked with Shah's delectably crisp observational details. The hypnotic 'Ladies For Babies (Goats For Love)' unravels the pressures loaded onto 'femininity', while 'Walk's' nervy energy is fuelled by a bleakly familiar scenario for most women, Shah included: dealing with street harassment and threat when simply trying to go out or get home:

'That song's chorus was: "I just wanna walk"; we're not public property, and we're not there to be heckled or touched,' says Shah. 'A lot of us have done a walk home, with keys between the fingers; "text me to let me know you've got home" is a really casual, normal thing to say to friends – you just throw it out, like it's nothing.'

There is a defiant strength and joy at play here, too, and Shah adds that she wants women, and all listeners, to feel empowered by the album:

'Without sounding too arrogant, it's my proudest bit of work,' she says. 'I've just been desperate to go out and gig it because it's so kinetic. There may be some dark, sobering messages in there, but a lot of it is tongue-in-cheek, and powerful as well; I want it to be a positive, uplifting album.'

Some of *Kitchen Sink's* inspirations might prove particularly unexpected: 'On this album, there's loads of cheeky little synth sounds. My favourite programme in the world is *Sesame Street*, so the album was inspired by Dr John and Dr Teeth [The Muppets' house band leader] – just sonically, because I wanted it to be bombastic!'

Where The Muppets were backed by the Electric Mayhem, tonight's show reunites Shah with her own talented alt-rock musicians, who she's obviously missed over months of various Lockdowns:

'My band are some of the most amazing players in the world; they're incredible,' she enthuses. 'There's the legend Ben Hillier on drums - my collaborator and producer; Pete Wareham [Melt Yourself Down] on saxophone; he's a virtuoso, I think he's the one musician who's been on the most Mercury-nominated albums ever. There's Neill McColl, and he's from a folk dynasty; if we didn't have Neill, we'd need three guitarists to play his parts. There is Ben Nicholls on bass; he's a powerhouse. We've got a new guy,

barbican

Marcus Hamblett, on keys, percussion, and maybe even extra brass as well as my favourite young engineer/guitarist Dan Crook who I never want to play without.'

Musically, *Kitchen Sink* promises numerous live highlights, from the glorious flourishes of 'Club Couga'r to its title track and 'Ladies For Babies...'

'They're both so much fun to play; I was saying for years that we needed a handclap track!' says Shah. 'I'm also really looking forward to performing 'Buckfast' because it's got a really great groove; the theme is dark – it's about gaslighting – but I love that song. 'Wasp's Nest', 'Kite' and 'Prayer Mat' are really emotional, because they're all about my mother, who was dying when I made this album. They'll be difficult to play, I imagine, because at the last gig I played, she was there. But my father will be there at the Barbican, and loads of people I know, so I'll be giving it my all.'

While Shah describes herself as 'a bit of a nomad' (now based in the Kent coastal town of Ramsgate after eighteen years in London, but regularly back in Newcastle near where she was raised), there's also a sense of homecoming in her return to the live stage:

'It's the people you meet along the way: the fans, other musicians, the people that run the shows. My favourite thing is to listen to other people; my job is to tell their stories. I've really missed them. I'm really worried that I'm just going to be crying on stage; everyone's really emotional, because we haven't played together for so long. I've cried before,' she muses, before deciding: 'I'll cry again. It's fine.'

Performers

Nadine Shah principle artist

Ben Hillier musical director, drums

Ben Nicholls bass, vocals

Dan Crook guitar, keyboard

Marcus Hamblett guitar, keyboard, trumpet, percussion, vocals

Neill McColl guitar, vocals

Pete Wareham saxophone

Produced by the Barbican



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