

[Home](#) → [Culture](#) → Into Music Reviews: Stone Foundation at Oran Mor, Glasgow

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Act: **Stone Foundation**

Venue: **Oran Mor, Glasgow**

Date: **15 November 2018**

Music is all about making connections and the links in the chain keep lengthening and strengthening for the ever-expanding congregation of Midlands-based soul band Stone Foundation. Guitarist and singer Neil Jones and bassist Neil Sheasby met, serendipitously, when their respective bands supported each other and they soon realised that they were far stronger together. Following their musical coupling they attracted some of the best musicians in the country to their band, collaborating most prominently with Paul Weller, who has co-written with and produced them, and also with Bettye LaVette.

On their wonderful fifth and latest record (perhaps tongue in cheekily titled) *'Everybody, Anyone'*, Kathryn Williams and members of The Style Council and The Blow Monkeys turn up to join in! Their nine-piece live line-up includes a superb brass section (with added flute!), not only one incredible drummer in Phil Ford but also a groovy conga player in Rob Newton, Ian Arnold on the Hammond and Wurlitzer and new addition, Shona on backing vocals and harmonies.

So, they're used to crowding the stage but they are surprisingly still a little way from crowding venues. It's a faithful crowd of passionate fans who've showed up in full voice at Oran Mor tonight, and from the first notes of sublime opener *'Sweet Forgiveness'* I become incredulous that the place isn't packed (perhaps it's because Johnny Marr is playing up the road at The Barras!). The album and set opener perfectly introduces the band; the intro slowly reveals all the instruments as the song

steadily builds to a storming close with the whole band chanting the refrain “Nobody can do everything but everybody can do something”. The track also blueprints Neil Jones’ recurrent lyrical concerns of being spiritually driven forward to rise above struggles.

The joy that begins to build in this cosy venue, as the trumpets and sax create those rich, honeyed tones and the guitar and organ emit bursts of raw electricity, is magical; the acoustics of the converted church crypt have just the right amount of echo and sustain. The air in Oran Mor is sultry with the movements of grooving bodies and the fire being lit under the hearty R&B soup makes me feel as if I’m in a warm bath!

An energetic soul and rock band, with funky edges and catchy hooks, their songs soar, punching the air with uplifting messages. The old northern soul mantra of ‘*Keep On, Keeping On*’ seems like a career mantra displayed through their prolific output, their closeness with their fans (constant interaction throughout the gig and a definite mutual respect – Neil Jones professes his love of Scotland on several occasions) and the release upon release of quality, solid classics made for the dance-floor.

Tonight’s standout songs come from their back catalogue as much as the excellent new album. ‘*Beverley*’, with its anti-racist refrain of “the rules of the skin are wearing thin” ends, in trademark SF style, with the band leading a call and response; the crowd echoing “talking to you/talking to you”. ‘*Pushing Your Love*’ is a melancholy ballad with a reggae lilt in the chorus, made a bit faster and funkier tonight, which again delivers the message of the importance of keeping going. I had moments of epiphany, emotional release and catharsis during the performance, it was emotionally charged, the whole band fully immersed and willing the sound on with passion and dedication.

Neil Jones has an irrepressible, upbeat energy, bouncing about and leaning into his guitar solos in Chuck Berry poses at the edge of the stage, while the statuesque Sheasby is an anchor, holding a solid legs-spread pose while creating the central guiding bass grooves. The brass section smile, joke and join in on backing vocals and when Shona comes to the front for a couple of tunes we have the new, formidable, glamorous member of the gang doing some soul struttin’ and the friendly but feisty attitude is infectious.

Yet another golden collaborator on ‘*Everybody, Anyone*’ is Hamish Stuart, Glasgow-born singer/guitarist with the Average White Band. ‘*Only You*’ ends with a cheeky outro of AWB’s biggest hit, the jazz/funk instrumental ‘*Pick up the Pieces*’ – it’s a playful nod to the musical lineage that informs and delights them and also an homage to one of Scotland’s musical heroes, it feels respectful and rejoicing.

Clearly a closely-cherished, cult concern, I’m sure their upcoming tour supporting Paul Weller in forests up and down the U.K. will mean we might not see them in such intimate venues again so I feel extremely lucky to be here tonight at a gig I will never forget! Even though they have been going for eight years now it feels that we are witnessing a band approaching the mountaintop, with that call on the communal energy resources and that final push of energy to take them to the top; it’s both breath-taking and giddy to watch!

An encore, a group bow and a swift and sweaty trip to the merch stall to grab the new record (the band members are already there chatting) then outside, out of the soup and into the winter air, where I get chatting with far more seasoned fans basking in the glow of the last two hours transcendence! I meet a couple who have followed the band to Germany before and others who have travelled from up and down the UK to be here tonight! We swap set highlights and musical recommendations (The Spitfires, playing at Broadcast the following night and Edgar Jones, who had supported SF on previous tour dates). As Neil Jones said with a grin and a wink at the end of the show – “Spread the Word” – and now that I’m a true convert I’ll be giving the man a hand!

Cara Govan