

ALESTORM VOYAGER DARKER HALF MANNING BAR 13/05/11

Only at a show headlined by four madcap Scotsmen could there be a larger collection of swords, eye-patches, swashbuckling hats and tunics than the new *Pirates Of The Caribbean* movie.

With the room rapidly filling, Sydney's **Darker Half** experienced a series of sound gremlins, but worked through them in their usual energetic, Maiden-meets-Queensryche-plus a dose of thrash style. *Duality* and *Heads Are Gonna Roll* elicited a warm response and material from their forthcoming new full-length was a positive indicator for the future.

Likely inspired by the headliner's antics, **Voyager** vocalist Daniel Estrin sported a keytar, bottle and a smile you couldn't have removed with a sandblaster. The Perth prog-power crew boasted a little added polish and presence compared to their predecessors; arguably not as headbangable, but containing a multitude of smooth, infectious melodies. A majestic *Lost* and *Sober* were highlights, also continuing the evening's running theme of road-testing as-yet-unreleased material. As is par for the course, the set featured their much-loved pop and rock covers medley, further endearing them to the crowd.

Alestorm almost immediately lived up to their boozy reputation, with frontman Christopher Bowes playing a keytar solo with one hand while sculling a drink with the other. "We're here to drink your beer, fuck your women and play 90 minutes of true Scottish pirate metal," he bellowed – as apt a description of their mission statement as any and one greeted with an uproarious reaction from the large, raucous gathering. Basing their subject matter on the topics of alcohol, plundering, women and more alcohol ("This is a song about wenches and mead – it's called *Wenches And Mead*"), they understandably weren't the tightest outfit and the set followed much the same pattern as last year's showing, but placed in front of a crowd utterly enamoured with their folk/power metal, it mattered little. Simple, singalong choruses delivered with gusto are the band's forte – *Black Sails At Midnight*, *The Quest*, *Heavy Metal Pirates* and *Keelhauled* afforded particularly loud audience participation. Also incorporating cuts from their upcoming record *Back Through Time*, it became apparent that although there's very little variation within Alestorm's formula – and to be blunt, an hour and a half of similarly styled fare tested the patience somewhat – their dedicated, hard-partying fans can't wait to don the pirate clobber and walk the plank again.

Brendan Crabb