Hot Club De Paris charm me instantly with their bolshie attitude.  The Scousers open up for business with some first-rate interstitial banter, after tearing through a spiky motif.

‘Say we’re shit.  Go on,’ goads drummer, Alasdair, ’I’m fucking bulletproof.’  The attendees seem a little bit intimidated by the lads, which only exacerbates the issue, ‘Well you’re a jolly lot, aren’t you?’ the drummer barks.  This confrontational slant is tempered by the decaffeinated guitarist and bass player who chirp along cheerily, making dry observations.  The audience slowly turns in favour of the Liverpudlians, relaxing enough to participate in some playful repartee.  The flawless three-part barbershop harmonies and dextrous playing would have some say in this as songs from album ‘Live at Dead Lake and EP ‘With Days Like This As Cheap As Chewing Gum, Why Would Anyone Want To Work?’ are given a rigorous stretch.

Sadly for whatever love may have blossomed between this reviewer and Hot Club De Paris, something happens that completely overshadows the set.   I’m suddenly interrupted by a hand placed firmly at my shoulder.

‘Mind if I join you?’ comes a familiar voice that drawls.

I look up and lo and behold, it’s Mike Watt.  The Mike Watt.  Do I mind if Mike Watt joins me?  There’s a pregnant pause whilst I mull this over.  Of course, I eventually conclude that I’m socially maladroit, irritable and very much harassed at this point.  ‘Hit the bricks Watt!’ I snap.

Of course I didn’t say that.

So Mike Watt pulls up a pew and together with my buddy, we watch the remainder of Hot Club De Paris’ set.  When the band launch intoMinutemen’s ‘The Anchor’ I swear I notice Mike, who I’ve been watching furtively from the corner of my eye since he arrived, well up in tears.  In fact, throughout each song Mike looks so genuinely emotionally invested that I feel slightly guilty for being so distracted from the performance.  I’m concentrating so hard on restraining myself that my friend leans in to prod my Rigor Mortis-afflicted body, just to double-check that I’ve not somehow been cryogenically frozen by the hand of Watt.   I sit with a thousand yard stare and fight out an inner dialogue between pathetic fan boy and stoic, sensible, well-behaved, reasonable young man; a character I can sometimes assume if I call upon my Method training and avoid E numbers.

‘Ask him about George Hurley!’

‘No, let the guy enjoy his beer!’

‘Give him a copy of your demo!’

‘Don’t be so vulgar!’

I almost rocket through the ceiling when Mike interjects with an enthusiastic, ‘Great aren’t they?’ the smile on his face a chasm of brimming, impish joy.

Hot Club conclude triumphantly with a nod to tonight’s headliner; their ‘favourite artist in the World’ and then with a clenched wrench of a handshake, Mr Mike Watt bids me adieu.  He actually thanks us for the company.

Third opera ‘Hyphenated-Man’ occasions Mike Watt and The Missingmen’s visit to our shores.  He portends the show with a quick ‘we’re gonna play this weird shit for you’ and Arrow-Pierced-Egg-Man arrives *tout de suite*.  I am immediately enraptured by Watt’s Missingmen - Raul Morales on drums plays feverish tom rolls and Tom Watson on guitar, pinballing around the cosy stage with a silver comet’s tail trailing the shock of white hair that sits atop his head.  The songs bloom with kinks of jazz and flourishes of funk; all hallmark devices of The Minutemen.   The thirty songs of Hyphenated-Man are a sequential song cycle based on the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch.  The fact that the album follows a narrative imbues the live interpretation with an unrelenting vigour.  No sooner has one diversion into treble-heavy punk come to a clattering halt than Watt is whispering odd spiels above muted lounge music.  At one point I, as Watt did the previous set, I begin to well up.

I can’t remember where or how I first heard The Minutemen.  In all likelihood it was probably the instrumental version of ‘Corona’ which presaged episodes of Jackass that introduced them to me, albeit unknowingly.  I was an avid reader of Henry Rollins’ books which he printed through his own 2.13.61 publishing house.  Minutemen’s first gig was in support of Black Flag, they were signed to Greg Ginn’s SST and Watt was married to former Flag bassist Kira Roessler.  I must have first set about on my Minutemen voyage of discovery via Hank Rollins’ tour diaries.  The Minutemen were part of that very special coterie of bands that espoused tenets rooted in camaraderie and do it yourself ethos.  They arguably spearheaded it.  Whereas the rock superstars they grew up idolising such as Blue Oyster Cult seemed completely untouchable and ethereal, The Minutemen typified real.  Dennes Boon, Mike Watt and George Hurley were corndogs from San Pedro; working class Joes who wrote deeply experimental, cerebral, fearless music.  When I watch footage of D. Boon singing History Lesson Part 2, when he utters the simple, honest line “Me and Mike Watt, playing guitar” and Mike chuckles to himself, I think of me and my buddy who has come along to the gig with me tonight.  We write music together, but most of all we are brothers.

On this night at the Cluny, Watt and his Missingmen played an album that he wrote on his best friend, D Boon’s old Telecaster.  When they charge into The Minutemen’s ‘The Glory of Man’ it’s hard not to be affected by the power of the music and the line “I live sweat, but i dream light years”.  At the heart of this music is brotherhood.  Watt has helped mobilise musicians and has been  a unifier of the under classes since way back when he formed The Reactionaries, through and past the death of his best friend, Boon.  At the heart of this music is a love story between two brothers.

‘Start your own band!’ he calls to the rapturous crowd before jumping back in his boat to another town.