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Concert Review

Joe Strummer The Warehouse - Toronto, Nov 20, 1999

The Best Concert I Ever Saw was the Toronto stop of 1982's Combat Rock tour by the Clash. The band imploded soon after, leaving a void that remains to this day.

Fans of the Clash hoped for a reconciliation, a reunion, or at least some good solo albums. What they got was some interesting music from Big Audio Dynamite, and one lone Joe Strummer Album, Earthquake Weather.

The public forgot about the Clash, and the Clash forgot about making music. A few years ago, the band enjoyed a resurgence of interest after one of their songs was used in a TV commercial. Clash music was re-packaged and re-issued, and rumours of a reunion started anew.

While the rumoured reunion hasn't materialized, fans have had much to celebrate in 1999, with a new Clash movie, a live album, and a new release and tour from Joe Strummer's new band, the Mescaleros. Which brings us to Saturday's Toronto concert by the Mescaleros. I expected a pale, sloppy, warmed-over nostalgia show.

Joe in his latter-day Elvis mode, all overweight and out of tune, sweating and breathless. Instead, I found that the years have been kind to Joe Strummer. This year's Joe started the evening with a batch of new songs from his album Rock Art and the X-Ray Style. Put briefly, this album is Sandinista's worthy successor.

It mixes elements of dub, rock, reggae and techno, resulting in a great album with a 90s sound. The new songs went over very well live, and the crowd quickly warmed up to new tracks like "Yalla Yalla", "Tony Adams" and "X-Ray Style".

Clash fans hoping to hear some of the old stuff didn't have long to wait. Songs from every style and every era were included in the set.

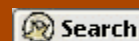
"Brand New Cadillac" and "Rock the Casbah" were played early, and were well received, but the audience really came alive after "London Calling", "Safe European Home", "White Man in Hammersmith Palais" and "Pressure Drop". Encores included "Straight to Hell", "Tommy Gun" and "Bankrobber".

It may not have been the Clash playing, but Joe and his band gave the kind of passionate performance that the songs deserved. If you're a Clash fan, but couldn't make the show, you can still catch the band on the Conan O'Brien show on November 25th

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