

Rock of Ages

Examining Rock 'n Roll's Immortal Youthful Exuberance and Its Aging Fans, Critics and Band Members

"And he was too old to rock 'n' roll
But he was too young to die"

By
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ABSTRACT

The fans of Rock 'n Roll music, like many of us, continue to live and age and enjoy life to the timeless, ageless and forever young music that defined their age, metaphorically or literally. The music makers themselves, as well as their producers, production managers, roadies and groupies, continue to live and age and enjoy life.. unless that is if you overdose, choke on your own vomit or are a drummer for Spinal tap. But the music never dies, never ages, it lives on, as it should. The question this dissertation sets out to examine is whether the aged musician, too old to rock yet too young to die, should continue on? Should the aged pot-bellied, crippled, balding fans be allowed to partake in the same level of spiritual and physical worship of their aged hero's?

SETTING THE STAGE

We missed Lita Ford – the BBQ joint was full, and we needed to properly lubricate ourselves for the evenings festivities. We caught Poison's last four songs, one of which I knew. This knowledge prevented me from taking any joy out of the fact there was a cowboy hatted man on stage holding an acoustic twelve string guitar. I could not take pleasure in this scene, for I was fairly certain he would start playing it and singing it momentarily. And he did. After the start of the previous three song Evonne would excitedly exclaim “I forgot about this song!” and proceed to sing every word.

I wanted these aged, ex-sleaze merchants vamp and strut and do their thing. I instantly found myself starting at one of the gray haired guitar players. Well, not him per se, but more accurately his guitar. A classic, light blue “V” shaped axe back in the days of checkered spandex, bad perms and colorful bandanas wrapped around and hanging from everyone and anything. As this the V swayed from side to side with the rhythm I could not help but think it was literally just a toy. I understand guitars are toys to those who even love, respect and cherish them – let alone play them – but what I was seeing in this strange man's hands was a toy, not unlike that of a Wii controller. I could see no wires protruding from it. I saw no amps stacked anywhere on stage, not any kids of equipment whatsoever anyplace. I saw lights, screens, smoke machines, etc., but no keyboards, no pedals, no amps, monitors, control boards, nothing with many dials or knobs.. nothing. It was the first time in memory it seemed, that I saw a musician just playing a guitar and not adjusting things or using any other device or mechanism to control or alter the sound of the instrument. Alex, Pete, Jimi, Stevie.. when on stage playing their axe they were fiddling with other gear as much as playing their guitar. Not this Poison boy, he just held his guitar and played. It made me think he still – after all of these years – did not know how to play it, let alone tune it, adjust it, step on a waa waa, etc. It was just a toy a roadie handed to him and said, “Don't touch anything, just do the power chords I showed you and that is it. Have a great show.”

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We were there fifteen minutes, they sang about a rose with a thorn and a cowboy who sings sad songs, and then Poison left the stage. Whether speaking metaphorically, actually or referring to the band this event will always be only a good thing.

MAIN EVENT

The British flag hung down as the Who rocked out through the Rock's brand new sound system. It was the best music I heard all night. And then it faded away... the house lights dimmed smoke rolled across the stage... the elderly audience strained their throats as they tried to scream as they screamed in their youth... the flag dropped... and boy did I laugh! As three of the band members stood stone-link, their silhouettes visible before the large screens, up from the bottom of the stage, from the depths of... of... someplace rose the remaining two band members on slow moving columns. I laughed even harder for to me, all I was was Stonehenge! I waited for the two elves to enter stage left and prance about a bit, but instead, Def Leppard started their show.

The lead signer wearing a cloak, two guitarists – one shirtless, a spandex wearing bass player and ¾ of a drummer started doing what they do. They sounded not bad, tight, hit all the light and video cues, executed their well choreographed running amok about the two level stage bit flawlessly and pulled off a decent show. Like Poison, I noticed no amps or any additional gear anywhere. They were all just holding toys. In fact, as I listened to a song that literally had the same chord changes and rhythm and melody of the previous song, I suddenly imagined I was in a video game. The music these guys were playing their aged hearts out for sounded nothing more than the soundtrack of a bad video game. Now is the time for the little elves to come prancing out and jumping over mushrooms and throwing barrels and such things.

This music was canned music when it came out in the early 80's, and it certainly sounded that way now seeing that the vessels of this music were so old. Sure, the guitar players hit every note cleanly, the singer maintained his voice and the drummer drummed. This guy, after overcoming a very traumatic accident needs to be given all the credit and respect in the world for getting behind the drum kit again. However, I feel it can't do unsaid that it merely sounds as if his highest aim, his only goal in hitting the skins is not sounding like a drum machine.

I tried to get into the music as the 16 year old next to me was. Evonne was transported back to her childhood bedroom and danced, and screamed and shimmied and shook and sung every word of every song. Even she was amazed not only at her sense of recall, not only of the power of her inner child to be released, but amazed at how much fun she had! I was thoroughly enjoying her enjoyment.. the price of admission right there. There were moments a particular riffs reached down into the depth of my memory and burst forth with images and sensations I had not considered for decades. Other moments

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when a smile appeared on my face as I recall singing the words in my car or on my living room floor while watching MTV: "Bringing on the Heart Break" was one such moment. But there were two moments that grabbed me and did not bring me back into the moment and let me "be" the moment, but pulled me out and allowed me to gain perspective.

The first was when after a costume change (for everyone except shirtless guitar guy) the light turned on, the drum kicked in, and "the" song started. Everyone got up on their feet and walkers. This was the song we all wanted to hear. Evonne went nuts. A smile spread across my face. Then I watched a grown man sincerely sing, "pour some sugar on me.. in the name of love." something about this moment made me laugh out loud and hard. It was not a mocking, evil laugh. I was not making fun. I was *having fun!* I took a step back and got happy at the fact that nearly 40 years later, these same guys were singing their same songs to the very same people who bought the very records that have kept them figuratively, if not literally, alive. The power of rock and roll. The thrill of rock and roll. The FUN of rock and roll.

The second moment that brought it all together and back around, however you wish to say it had to do with one of the guitarists. He was not taking a lead, or featured in the song he was playing, but nonetheless he was up at the top of the stage that extended into the audience. Playing, smiling, jostling with the outstretched hands. The rhythm stopped briefly and like a drummer, he tossed his guitar pick high in the air... and snatched at it and missed it on its way down. He shook it off like a pro and begin his journey down the plank to the main stage then off to side right. There was no reason for me to be focusing on him, but there I was doing just that. He walked just about off stage and motioned with his hand for someone to bring him a new pick. He stopped a bit lower, motioned again more vigorously while nodding his head and out ran what appeared to be an eight year old girl. She ran out on stage to her daddy (I assume?) handed him his pick, and then scooted off stage just as fast. He turned to face the crowd and continued playing but several times looked to his right with a very large smile on his face.

Thirty one years later and he's on stage, rocking out like a king and instead of chasing skirts he's playing for his little girl. Rock & roll..

"Now I sing all my songs
for the girl who won my heart.
She is only three years old
and that's a real fine way to start."