

16 Jun 2006 - Concert Review - Roger Waters Band Curva Olimpico Stadium, Rome, Italy

Simply put, one of the best gigs I've ever seen in my life.

No comparison whatsoever with RW's 2002 show in Rome, where both the venue and the early hour (it was this same time of year, when the days are longest) played against him. Yesterday night the awesome light show was used to its full potential, complementing the magnificent music perfectly.

The show's venue was one of particular significance to football fans, being the fabled Curva Sud of the mighty Stadio Olimpico - home of AS Roma's ebullient followers (and that's a bit of an understatement...). Needless to say, the terraces were full, while the seats below, right in front of the stage, were probably not sold out because of the hefty price of admission (almost 100, but worth every single cent). I was sitting there myself, so I was able to enjoy the gig from close up.

The show began at 9.30 p.m., when darkness had already set in. We saw the band come on stage when it was still dark, then Roger stepped up to the edge of the stage, greeted us in Italian and asked "Are you ready?". Then, an eruption of light, sound and fireworks marked the beginning of an unforgettable three hours...

BTW, here's the setlist:

In The Flesh
Mother
Set the controls for the Heart of the Sun
Shine on You Crazy Diamond
Have a Cigar
Wish you Were Here
The Gunner's Dream
Southampton Dock
The Fletcher Memorial Home
Perfect Sense 1 & 2
Leaving Beirut
Sheep

Intermission

Dark Side of The Moon (ALL of it - every single note!)

Encores:

The Happiest Days of Our Lives
Another Brick in the Wall pt.2
Vera
Bring the Boys Back Home
Comfortably Numb

Roger was in great shape: those who think that 62 means old and doddering should take a good look at him. He looks better than he ever did as a young man, and his stage presence, while not sharing any of the features of the stereotypical rock frontman, is quite commanding. I'm very happy to say that his voice was quite up to scratch too. He's never been a "great singer" in the Greg Lake or Steve Walsh mould (to name but two), but he's always been one of my favourite vocalists for the sheer emotion he puts in his delivery and the way he interprets his own words. Of course, he got a little help from the very gifted trio of female backing vocalists, but he sang most of his parts alone, mostly playing bass or acoustic guitar.

The band (all dressed in black) were very tight as well, featuring some of Roger's longtime collaborators, such as guitarist Snowy White (whom I had seen back in 1980 when PF performed "The Wall" on stage) and veteran Andy Fairweather-Low. Roger's son Harry (a funny character, with long, reddish-blond hair and a thick, curly beard) played keyboards, as he had done in 2002.

The real surprise of the show, though, was lead guitarist Dave Kilminster, better known for having been a member of the short-lived Qango (with John Wetton and Carl Palmer) and of Keith Emerson's band. I'd heard of him in the past, but didn't realise how good a guitarist he was, even though quite different from Gilmour. As a matter of fact, he looked every inch the guitar hero, tossing his mane of dark hair about, with a sleeveless T-shirt showing his trim physique to its best advantage and enhancing all his moves. Yes, I thought he looked rather sexy... Are ladies not allowed to drool sometimes?

For those of you who were wondering about Kilminster taking up Gilmour's vocal parts, he actually did not do much singing, at least not on his own. From what I could hear on "Money" (the only song he sang solo), he's quite a good vocalist, slightly reminiscent of Gilmour, but richer and more powerful. His guitar playing, though, was spectacular: no mere Vai clone (as I read somewhere on this forum), but someone also able to play in Gilmour's slower, more reflective and atmospheric style. His contrast with the sedate Snowy White (who used to play in Thin Lizzy...) was quite striking, especially when the two were playing solos together - White calmly standing in the spotlight, Kilminster throwing shapes and wringing all kinds of sounds from his green-and-white guitar.

As to the highlights of the show, they're definitely too many to mention. The whole rendition of DSOTM was flawless, and the images projected on the backing screen didn't just enhance the music - they were a part of it, as in the unbelievably intense "On the Run/Time" double whammy. The most touching use of images, though, accompanied the highly political "The Fletcher Memorial Home" (a derelict rest home with pictures of politicians and dictators and chilling quotations decorating the walls), and Waters' newest song, the autobiographical "Leaving Beirut". In the latter (not so great musically, but with great lyrics promoting peace and understanding among different peoples), a cartoon told the story and the lyrics to the audience - who probably were not proficient enough in English in order to fully appreciate them. "Sheep" was also very powerful - a rarely-heard song, but undoubtedly one of PF's best-ever tracks. Finally, an absolutely stunning rendition of "Comfortably Numb" was a fitting close to such an outstanding show.

As somebody else pointed out, the whole gig was quite highly charged in a political sense - the choice of "Bring the Boys Back Home" was not at all casual. Fortunately, I happen to agree with Waters' views completely, and so did most of the audience. Therefore, this aspect added value to a great musical moment. Roger Waters is alive and well - after such a show, who needs a PF reunion?