Meet Mr. Loaf



Kevin G. Porter Photo

by Michael Edwards

A string quartet sat serenely on the stage playing interpretations of contemporary tunes when suddenly an 'axe' wielding maniac appears stage left. Nope, its not the new Stephen King movie (or at least not yet), just your average, every day Meatloaf concert. Once the guitarist chased the classical musicians off stage, and the introduction to "I Would Do Anything For Love" started then you could be sure it was a Meatloaf concert - plenty of loud guitars, female backing vocals, and Meat himself resplendent in frilly shirt. Quite a sight.

All the songs were taken from the Bat Out Of Hells, and it felt as if the 16 years between never happened. As if the years apart from Jim Steinman didn't matter. And the most incredible thing was that the material from the two albums mixed almost seamlessly - Bat Out Of Hell sounded as good today as it did in 1977 while the new songs can stand up all by themselves. Combined it made for a rather entertaining evening.

The concert itself didn't really provide any real shock; the songs sounded just like they did have in the past except a few extra guitar solos were added for good measure. This didn't really make for short songs with the first three taking the better part of forty minutes, but ceremony and pomp is the thing that puts Steinman's songs and Meatloaf's performance above the competition. Meatloaf did give the songs everything he had, and sounded pretty darned good despite the infamous acoustics at the Aitken Centre. When they wheeled out the inevitable grand piano near the start of the second act (they played Wagner during the interval...), one of the highlights of the show came with "Heaven Can Wait" which also seemed to be a good excuse to hold your lighter aloft and sway from side to side too. And during "Bat Out Of Hell" it was all I could do to try and stop myself from punching the air. The encore turned out to be the appropriately titled "Everything Louder Than Everything Else" climaxed with six guitarists for a plank-spanking, glitterbomb finale.

The only thing that didn't so much spoil it for me as just get irritating was the way that Mr. Loaf hammed it up at every opportunity. Its something that is inevitable when a concert takes place in a larger venue and the emphasis becomes more theatrical. This isn't a problem with songs like "Paradise By The Dashboard Light" where such a performance between himself and female foil Patricia Russo adds to the song. But splitting the audience in half and having "who can make the most noise?" competitions? Hmm. And the ever so cliched "You're the best and I love you all" comments can grate a bit too, but the majority of the audience lapped it up by making even more noise. And I did hear some concerned parents commenting about the colourful language used too - its obviously longer than they remember since Bat Out Of Hell came out.

Yup, it was a good night that featured all the excesses that Meatloaf and Steinman stand for. A rockin' good time.

by Chris Oxford

Let there be no doubt, Meat Loaf was served in generous proportions to a capacity crowd at the Aitken Centre last Friday. If you missed it, you have probably already heard that it was better than Aerosmith or Blue Rodeo. Without doubt it was the best concert since Tina Turner was here in the summer of '84.

It was better than I imagined it would be when I lined up at 5 A.M. waiting for tickets to go on sale. I was determined to have front row tickets and I got the best money could buy. I still remember buying *Bat Out of Hell* and wearing the record out in three weeks;drove my mother to bingo.

It's hard to believe that was fifteen years ago. The excitement in the City was growing, as Much Music and other members of the rock scene reported on the success of Meat Loaf's world tour. *Bat Out of Hell II* was selling faster than Mayor Brad's polar dip with Bridges House!! So imagine our surprise on the morning of the BIG TICKET EVENT (and I don't mean Meat Loaf who is a svelte 190 lbs!!!), when it was announced that the Saint John String Quartet would open for the Showman from Dallas Texas. Hey! I know that several of Meat Loaf's songs are considered classics, but this was not what I had in mind.

Getting to the concert/AUC was more adventuresome than Humphrey Bogart's African Queen, but that's another story for another time. When we arrived to our front row seats, the Saint John String Quartet was already playing. Since no one was booing or throwing their "I Love Tonya" buttons at them, I figured it was worth a listen. I've always had a fondness for strings in rock music since the days of Phil Spectre and his "Wall of Sound". Examples of strings in some good tunes are *Conquistador* by Procol Harum or *Can't Get It Out of My Head* by Electric Light Orchestra. Anyway, you get the concept. Well, hats off to the SJSQ for their brilliant playing of Meat Loaf's hits. Their sound was surreal and not at all out of place in the AUC. Both Meat Loaf and Jim Steinman, the creator of the BOH albums/CDs, love classical music. And so did the crowd at the AUC. They gave the SJSQ a warm and noisy reception.

As we were enjoying the original sounds of concert music in its traditional form, a Snake came on stage and drove the penguins away with his raunchy, wailing electric guitar. They were obviously frightened by this louder and more superior sound. Satan would be pleased!!!. Before you could say "Bat Out of Hell", the integral ingredients of Meat Loaf assumed their rightful positions on stage. All except the MAN!! When he finally made his appearance dressed in his ruffled white shirt, brocade vest, and velvet trousers, the crowd was on its feet howling with approval. It was a night to remember.

The opening number was the big hit that launched the rebake of Meat Loaf: "I Would Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do That)". The other half of this duet was a spirited gal called Patricia, who had better pipes than Alberta Gas Line. She could sing like the devil, but she looked like an angel. Dressed in stunning white, her black hair and ruby red lips melted me like butter in a microwave. She was hot and ready to rock. Which was a natural segue into "All Revved Up and No Place To Go".

The concert was part magic, part theatre and all Rock 'n' Roll. From beginning to end. Meat Loaf contorted, cavorted, and stole our hearts. With a look or a lean, we got the message as to who was in control of the next two and half hours of reheated Meat Loaf. The chemistry between Loaf and the members of his band transferred to the audience. We all felt that he was giving his all to each and every one of us. One admirer threw a white rose onto the stage. Loaf picked it up and said he loved us. Do bats lie? NOT!!!

Except for his little tirade on who was going to win the Super Bowl(he's from Dallas, remember!!), there were no long pauses or mindless banter to amuse the crowd. It was nonstop excitement!! Guitar picks were flying. Smoke pots were blasting. We were *ROCKING!!* All the stars were aligned for a successful show. The lighting was effective and not overdone. The graphics on the backdrops depicted the legendary scenes from BOH and BOH II. The staging was dressed with see-through panels painted in gothic street scenes. We were treated to a musical theatrical sorcery. I enjoyed it. My only complaint was that the drummer's symbols were not Sabian!!

We were there to watch him perform "Life Is A Lemon", but nobody wanted their money back. We sang. We yelled. We danced. We were involved—no committed. A superb showman demonstrated that the AUC can be filled if you have an imaginative and compelling performance.

Don't ask about the finale because you had to be there. For those of you who had tickets, but couldn't get a cab or fell on the ice and ended in hospital missing the spectacle, let me say it didn't disappoint. The show closer was "Paradise By The Dashboard Light". Probably the best known and loved songs of the Meat Loaf repertoire, it was GREAT!! Patricia dressed up in a prom dress replete with wrist corsage and too-tall spikes. Pouting impishly in her blonde wig, she looked every bit the part of a virginal seventeen year old on her big Prom date. Loaf transformed himself into a horny 18 year old who just got the keys to the old man's car. Pure rock 'n' roll rebellion. I sang along as best I could in my gravely voice not wanting this moment to end. The show had been pure heaven and now all I could think about was "Wasted Youth".

Loaf said he would be back and I believe him. The Devil can do anything for love. I just hope that we don't have to wait another ten years for a dynamite concert.