



Barenaked in Baltimore

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With usual good humor, the Ladies keep 'em on their feet at the Meyerhoff

Barenaked Ladies hasn't released a new album in more than a year, although the group recently re-released its 2004 *Barenaked for the Holidays* album innovatively on a USB thumb drive. Yet they play to sold-out audiences on nearly every tour stop.

In this present pre-holiday, theater-only mini tour of 22 cities, Baltimore's Meyerhoff Symphony Hall sold out the show in less than half an hour.

It's a not-so-big secret that the quintet is having the most fun in the business. They also give that fun back to their fans. Just take a look at their Web site (bnlmusic.com), and where else do you wander the lobby before a show and see all members of the band (in this instance minus drummer Tyler Stewart who was feeling "under the weather") hanging around for pictures, autographs and a few friendly words?



Barenaked Ladies

On the U.S. tour dates, BNL also fills their audience with free seats for U.S. armed forces members and their families, all armed with backstage passes. The band greeted them backstage for an hour and a half after the show.

The stage at the Meyerhoff on Nov. 28 was warmly decorated like a Christmastime living room, complete with fake fireplace (with real-fake flames), stockings, real lit fake tree, and wreathed-door where Fanta Claus stood almost all night, occasionally banging on some drums. You can be sure that there always is some character dressed up on stage at a BNL concert.

The opening act was The LeeVeas, playing all-Jewish-themed humorous songs. The group was well received despite the lack of knowledge of Yiddish, Hebrew or Jewish customs referenced. The Children's Chorus of Annapolis followed with three holiday songs and were

then joined by BNL for another three.

Then it was time for the serious show to begin — the serious fun of a BNL show. It was a two hour, 24-song, powerhouse set (including the three with the chorus) and the audience never sat down — enthralled as they were by the Ladies. A strange sight indeed in the hallowed halls of the Meyerhoff.

Nine songs of the set were holiday songs and the balance was made up of their hits, with a few surprises thrown in as the audience's collective stocking stuffers. A brand-new song was debuted in Baltimore called "Everything Had Changed," which was a beautiful ballad featuring the lead vocals of Steven Page. A last-minute switch was made and "Break Your Heart" was substituted in the first encore instead of the scheduled tune, "Good Boy."

We were all treated to the expected funny repartee before, during and between songs, some hysterical Barenaked "raps" (combining Balti-more with Dinty-Moore) and other antics of the band, including picking names from a (Santa) hat to determine which band member would play which instrument for "Feliz Navidad." Some cheating did occur.

The unique sound of the Barenaked Ladies is accentuated by their choice of instruments. In addition to the standard fare, you have smatterings of banjo, accordion and, of course, BNL member Jim Creeggan's bass.

Fun and excitement were brought into the audience with lead singer, guitarist and resident heartthrob Ed Robertson playing on the edge of the stage, and running through the aisles on one song. The band made concerted efforts to play to the nether reaches of the hall as well. The co-lead vocals of Page and Robertson were superb and rich, Page's vocals, though, always the more formidable and beautiful, often eclipsing Robertson's.

The highlight of the show was likely an especially operatic-quality soprano rendition of "Silent Night" by Page closing out "If I Had A \$1,000,000" (you can listen to this version on the USB thumb drive's bonus live music folder).

Of course, they played the expected big hits that made them the platinum-selling artists they are, such as "One Week," "Brian Wilson," "Old Apartment" and "Pinch Me," with everyone either dancing in their seats or jumping up and down (age specific).

Well-versed fans didn't get too unusual a selection with standards such as "Alternative Girlfriend" and "Sell, Sell, Sell," but "Straw Hat" and "Some Fantastic" were special treats. The sound-board guys advised this reviewer that "Some Fantastic" is only played when the band gauges the audience and decides to add it in at the end. I guess we were some show.

You, too, can hear the show from beginning to end, thanks to the miracles of technology and money. BNL provides high-quality recordings of every single concert on their Web site for a fee via download or CD, and while you're there don't forget the holiday album on compact thumb drive. It's a great stocking stuffer or Hanukah gelt! Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la!

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