



Part concert, part visual extravaganza, Green Day show thoroughly entertains

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I had been a somewhat-fan of Green Day since their early hits and have the CD's to prove it. But it wasn't until "American Idiot" that I became a convert, with their live concert being my revival meeting.

Fresh off of their seven-wins at the Video Music Awards, Green Day invaded Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia Tuesday night with Jimmy Eat World ("The Middle") as the opener for the sold-out tour date. The energy was nonstop and even rivaled — gasp — Bruce Springsteen's shows with his E Street Band.

Clocking in at just over two hours, no one could complain they didn't get dollar-for-dollar satisfaction or that they weren't soundly entertained.

The trio opened the concert with their No. 1 hit "American Idiot" from the same-titled No. 1 punk rock-opera album and followed the album order in succession with "Jesus of Suburbia," "Holiday" and "We Are the Waiting/St Jimmy." They finished up the night with two more songs from the current album: "Wake Me Up When September Ends" begun with the opening of "Letterbomb" ("Nobody likes you/Everyone Left you...") and, of course, "Boulevard of Broken Dreams."

Standard Green Day covers included a medley of "Shout" (Isley Brothers) and "Stand By Me" (Ben E. King), "Knowledge" (Operation Ivy) where audience members are always brought up on stage to play all the instruments while Billie Joe Armstrong sings and Queen's "We Are the Champions" in the encore.

The only complaint I had is that too few of the early songs were included, and some of them that were played were not as well-known to the audience, such as "King for a Day," "Hitchin' A Ride" "Minority" and the rarely played "Maria."

All ages had no problem singing along, as was often encouraged, to such Green Day favorites as "Longview," "Basket Case," "She" and the encore solo acoustic performance of "(Good Riddance) Time Of Your Life" by Armstrong.

Armstrong's voice was superb and rich, almost better live than recorded, and his charisma was, as always, magnetic and electrifying --- even at a distance. He couldn't help but overshadow his bandmates, bassist Mike Dirnt and drummer Tre Cool, both accomplished musicians. Armstrong even had a mascara moment early in the show, something only we women can understand.

The show was a performance as much as it was a concert, including the pre-band absurdist appearance of a 6-foot pink bunny suit-clad person ambling across the stage and guzzling beer to the song "YMCA"; extremely fiery pyrotechnics (10-foot vertical flames lines up across the stage, ear-splitting sonic boom explosions of flames and raining showers of firework sparks); Armstrong's power squirt gun hose spraying of the audience; and Halloween-styled costumes.

Although it disappoints to learn it's an exact replica of every concert date on the 2005 tour, the shtick is thoroughly enjoyable. And the fan swag is the best in the music biz: A guitar to the audience member pulled up on stage to play in place of Armstrong; drum sticks by the dozens; and white, red and green confetti emblazoned with the logo heart-grenade and "green day," all shot out of cannons in a whirlwind in the pavilion until you couldn't see even the people directly around you.

Most fans seemed to be prepubescent boys and screaming, gyrating, scantily clad teenage girls — all accompanied by their baby-boomer parents. It took only the opening notes of the first few songs to captivate the moms and dads as well.

For those of us who were used to the illumination of cigarette lighters to pay tribute to our favorite concert bands, the new millennium version is astounding as you view a sea of blue and white light emanating from open and waving cell phones.

Technology was also the main stage backdrop consisting of a "Green Day" LED sign, made up of 314 Color Kinetics LEDs with a matrix at the rear of the stage, which at times displayed '80s-era graphics, or the sing-a-long lyrics to "We Are The Champions."

I haven't been able to stop playing the new album since it first debuted, and this show barely quenched my thirst for more. But I will eagerly await Green Day's next whistle stop in their future tour circuit, now becoming a band I will perennially go to see live, and so should you.

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