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News: PITRIFF EXCLUSIVE - NIGHT RANGER REVIEW FROM DAY ON THE RANGE!

Posted by richwithhated on Jul 11, 2008 - 02:19 PM



Night Ranger
Frazee Pavilion
Kettering, OH
7/5/08

When discussing great rock and roll bands that are still killer in the live setting, Night Ranger are inevitably one of the first bands that I will mention in conversation. 2008 finds Night Ranger celebrating 25 years as a band, and the release of Hole in the Sun, the first album of all-new Night Ranger studio material in 10 years. Since returning to active duty in the mid-90s, Night Ranger have maintained the bulk of their original lineup (minus keyboard player Alan Fitzgerald) until 2007 when the band parted ways with guitarist Jeff Watson shortly after the completion of Hole in the Sun. Watson's departure put the first potential chink in the otherwise rock solid Night Ranger machine. As a diehard, I was nervous to see how guitarist Joel Hoekstra (and keyboard player Christian Cullen) would mesh with the core lineup of charter members Jack Blades, Kelly Keagy, and guitarist Brad Gillis. As it turns out, I had no need for worry.

Night Ranger were anchoring the headlining slot for an astounding 10

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band bill at the Frazee Pavilion in Kettering, OH (outside of Dayton) that was a who's who of 80s pop culture featuring former Babys frontman John Waite, Survivor, Patty Smyth and Scandal, and oddly enough, Taylor Dayne. After 10 hours of music, there was no question that the crowd, which had been there from the opening moments of Naked Eyes at high noon, still had plenty of energy left in the rock and roll tank for Night Ranger. The day's entertainment attracted a near-capacity crowd for the venue (which holds 4,500) and most of that crowd hung in there until the final notes of Night Ranger's set faded out. The veteran San Francisco rockers took the stage shortly after 10pm for an 80 minute set that covered all of the bases for diehards like myself, and also the casual fan that was just there to hear the "hits." Seven Wishes album track "This Boy Needs To Rock" kicked things off in fine fashion (with a bit of "Highway Star" thrown in for good measure,) slipping quickly into familiar territory with drummer Kelly Keagy's first lead vocal of the night on a typically smoking version of "Sing Me Away." A casual Night Ranger fan would be hard-pressed to pick out the "new guys" as guitarist Hoekstra and keyboard player Cullen fit in seamlessly with the familiar antics you've come to expect from a Night Ranger show. Hoekstra, Gillis, and Blades were all over the stage like madmen, and from the first moments, it was like Hoekstra had been a part of Night Ranger for years. Hoekstra pays complete respect to the band's legacy and does total justice to all of the riffs and guitar duels (with Gillis) that Night Ranger fans expect and love. No doubt, Hoekstra has had a tough and delicate slot to fill, replacing a fan favorite in Jeff Watson, but he makes it look easy without coming off as cocky. If anything, he just looks thrilled as a musician to be on stage playing great songs from the Night Ranger catalog every night.

Night Ranger's strengths have always included their unbelievable musical connection as a unit, picture-perfect harmonies, and the air guitar inspiring guitar riffs, a holy trinity that remains intact in 2008. And they have a lot of fun doing what they do - bassist/vocalist Jack Blades joked with the Frazee crowd about "Secret of my Success" being Night Ranger's "nah-nah song," and noted that "every band has one," as Night Ranger played riffs from Journey, Eddie Money, and finally the Beatles, "the band that EVERYONE stole from."

While introducing the Damn Yankees track "High Enough" (a longtime staple of the reunited Night Ranger setlist,) Blades paid tribute to fellow DY madman Ted Nugent, who had just played his "6000th career show" in Detroit the previous night. Blades noted that he and former DY bandmate Tommy Shaw had discussed and questioned that number, but "we're not going to bring it up to Ted - he'll shoot us up the butt with a bow and arrow!" Due to the festival schedule, the band wisely chose to focus on the hits, featuring only one track from Hole in the Sun - "You're Gonna Hear It From Me" which finds all five Night Ranger members contributing stacked gang vocals for the majority of the song. It would have been cool to hear at least one more song from the new album, but with limited space in the setlist, they chose a good one to share with the Kettering audience, and it went over well. Dawn Patrol-era smash "Don't Tell Me You Love Me" closed out the main set, and it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out which bases were left to cover.

For first song of a two-song encore, Keagy strolled out center stage to deliver the opening moments of his signature Night Ranger moment "Sister Christian." Keagy remains one of the most underrated vocalists in rock and roll with an unmistakable voice that has aged perfectly with the passage of time, and I think his drumming for Night Ranger is another important part of the Night Ranger sound

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that is often overlooked.

The set ended with a typically rockin' version of "(You Can Still) Rock in America." I say "typically rockin'," because you really can't go wrong with that song - it always sounds good. The Night Ranger setlist might seem a bit "by the numbers" for some, but they are the living-breathing-ROCKING definition of "entertainers." They deliver a tried and true "rock show" that is hard to match, sung by the singers that originally sang the songs, and they visibly have a ton of fun doing it. It's a breath of fresh air compared to recent "doing it for the check" tours from the likes of Van Halen, The Police, etc. I'm not sure where Jack Blades, Kelly Keagy and Brad Gillis get the energy (they're not getting any younger,) but I'm hoping that they'll be "motorin'" for a long time to come!

Setlist:

- This Boy Needs to Rock
- Sing Me Away
- Rumours In The Air
- High Enough
- Secret of My Success
- Eddie's Coming Out Tonight
- Sentimental Street
- You're Gonna Hear It From Me
- Four In The Morning
- When You Close Your Eyes
- Don't Tell Me You Love Me

encores

- Sister Christian
- (You Can Still) Rock In America

--By Matt Wardlaw

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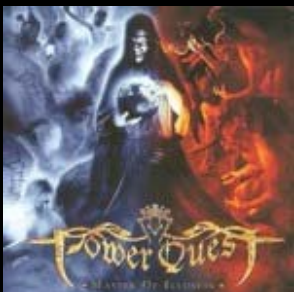
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