

Iron Maiden - The Final Frontier World Tour

April 14, 2011

Coliseo De Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico

w/ Aura Azul

Local heavy metal band Aura Azul opened for the night. The venue was still about at only a fifth of its capacity when they hit the stage, but even then it was still probably the largest crowd that the band has ever played in front of. They possessed lots of energy and they captivated the crowd, most of which probably didn't even know that there was a vibrant local scene. Lead vocalist Edgar impressed many with his voice and commanded everyone's attention. The band's blatant Maiden inspiration shined through, from Hommy's guitar solos to Emma's galloping bass playing. They silenced any critics they had (who probably had never even heard a single note of their music) and there's no doubt that the young band left making many new fans.

After a half hour, Aura Azul closed their set and about 20 minutes later, the lights went dark....

Before I continue, let's rewind a bit, to 3 years ago. It was March 12, 2008 and Iron Maiden returned to the island after 16 years on their Somewhere Back In Time world tour. It was their second nostalgia tour, focusing largely on the Powerslave to Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son albums, with select songs from earlier albums and one sole post-90's song (Fear Of The Dark). So basically the setlist was all classics and fan approval was across the board. This time around they are on tour supporting their fifteenth studio album, The Final Frontier. Many bands who tour in support of new studio albums are perfectly content in just playing two or three songs from the album and then pack the rest of the set with classics. Iron Maiden is no such band. They always play a minimum of 5 songs from each album they are supporting (and in the case of their previous album, 2006's A Matter Of Life And Death, they played the whole fucking thing). Clearly they believe in their own material and stand behind it.

The setlist of the current tour is essentially half new stuff and half old stuff. 16 songs: 5 from the new album, 3 from other post-Bruce and Adrian reunion albums and 8 of the band's classics.

Their set started with The Final Frontier album opener Satellite 15... The Final Frontier. This wasn't a surprise since they *always* start their sets with the opening track for whatever album they are touring in support of. What was a surprise was that the Satellite 15 part of the track was in essence the intro tape. On the album I find that particular part as a completely bizarre way to start off the album, but in the live setting, as an intro tape, it makes total sense. The slow build in the song was the perfect way to pump up the crowd and get them into a fever pitch. Once the Satellite 15 intro ended, the band finally exploded on stage and ripped right into the album's title track. As the first proper song, it possesses an energy live that it lacks on the studio version. Right off the bat Iron Maiden had the regrettably sparse crowd at full attention. Vocalist Bruce Dickinson had the crowd eating from the palm of his hand and kept it going for the second song, El Dorado. Like the previous song, El Dorado came across better live than on

record (they cut out that wild, crashing intro that felt out of place on the album). Later in the set came The Talisman and Coming Home, my two personal favorites from the album. The Talisman's epic 9 minute length came across great live while Coming Home got a big sing along chant during the chorus. Rounding out the new songs was the 11 minute When The Wild Wind Blows, in essence the centerpiece of the entire setlist, much like how Rime Of The Ancient Mariner was the big centerpiece of the 2008 set. Bruce's ability to tell a story was used masterfully here, telling a tale full of paranoia and desperation, concluding in one of the most depressing passages in the band's history. Besides the 5 tracks from The Final Frontier, the band also included in their set 3 songs from the earlier Bruce and Adrian reunion albums: The Wicker Man, Blood Brothers and Dance Of Death, all of which I'd put under the "classic" tag anyway. Blood Brothers was one of the night's biggest highlights, especially with Bruce's intro detailing their flight to Japan mere minutes before the catastrophic earthquake hit, forcing the band to cancel their two concerts there.

The other half of the band's set was, of course, comprised of seasoned classics. Most of these were played the last time: 2 Minutes To Midnight, The Trooper, Fear Of The Dark, Iron Maiden, The Number Of The Beast and Hallowed Be Thy Name. Besides those six, there were also two songs that they didn't play the last time: The Evil That Men Do and Running Free, both of which got the crowd into a glorious rapture. I won't lie. As much as I love songs like 2 Minutes To Midnight, The Trooper and The Number Of The Beast, I wouldn't have been bothered at all if they had replaced those with other songs, preferably ones that the band hasn't done here before. One omission that I know got under the skin of many was Run To The Hills. Look, it definitely is one of those timeless classics, but the band only plays a two hour set and I'd much rather listen to The Evil That Men Do, The Wickerman or Dance Of Death over it. I know of a few who flat out decided against going to the concert because of this omission. To these people all I have to say is this: you're weekend warriors and not real Maiden fans. Period.

Overall, I feel that this time they put on a much better show than they did in 2008. No, I'm not crazy, I'm absolutely serious. One of the main reasons was the sound, which was absolutely perfect this time around. The last time there was an unforeseen problem that almost resulted in the sudden cancellation of the show: the promoter didn't have any converters for the band's equipment. Their UK based equipment ran at a different voltage than what the venue had and no voltage converters could be found in time. A makeshift solution was made by plugging in the band's equipment directly into the venue's backup power generators, but the overall sound really suffered. The power gave out in several key spots (most memorably during The Number Of The Beast). The band did manage to pull through and completed the set without any major hang ups, but the inconsistency of the sound quality really hurt the show. Add to that the fact that Bruce wasn't acting all pissy and complained about both security and the fact that so many people in the crowd were on their cellphones instead of really watching the show. None of that happened this time however. Everything came off without a hitch and the band put on an amazing spectacle.