

Into the heart of Cygnus (X-1, that is)

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Time for a new post. How about a brief synopsis of a few concerts attended lately?

Part One: 09.08.07 – Rush – Tinley Park, IL Say what you will about these aging art rockers – Rush's live show certainly doesn't show any signs of weariness after 30+ odd years together. I first saw these cats way back on the 'Hemispheres' tour in 1978. (Notably, it was the first concert I ever attended.) In light of that, my sweet and lovely wife thought it would be nice to treat me to a 2007 version of the band and so purchased some very expensive front-row tickets for a show in a small amphitheater just outside of Chicago. (Named after some bank I'm sure).

In anticipation of the event, I went out and bought a copy of their latest album (can I still use that term these days?) 'Snakes and Arrows.' As much as I consider myself a fan, I have not purchased anything by the band since 1984, that being 'Grace Under Pressure'.

Admittedly, I could not stomach much of the material after that – as they seemed to be going in a musical direction more synth-based than the sonic overtures I had become accustomed to in their earlier days. (I challenge even the staunchest Rush fan to tell me they actually like 'The Big Money.') All that aside I was more than willing to listen with fresh ears. (A front row seat will do that for you.)

I was happy to find 'Snakes and Arrows' a return to form. I'll give you a quick CD review – if you like Rush even just a little, you'll love the new disc. If you never really got into Rush – there's nothing new here that will make a fan out of you. Love or hate them, the lyrics are stylistically recognizable Neil Peart musings – though with touches of politically charged sentiments reflecting the dark state of the world that ring fresh. And as always – Geddy, Alex and Neil simply put on a clinic of unrivaled musicianship, scorching their way through the tracks as though they have something to prove. (They certainly don't – but it sure is nice that they care enough about what they're doing to release quality material.) Here's a newsflash: Rush are as comfortable with orchestra-like arrangements, wickedly perverse time signatures and key changes as emo bands are with eyeliner. Nothing has changed over the years in that respect.

The live performance this night in Tinley Park was exemplary. No opening band – just two

full sets of Rush dedicated to showcase the new songs and brush the dust off of the old songs – a pleasing combination of stage show effects painstakingly choreographed to follow the set-list down to the most precise details. Whoever put it together knew they wouldn't have to worry about the band failing to hit their marks. With the addition of HD technology on three huge screens it really didn't matter what seat you were in – the band members were figuratively and literally in the faces of the crowd.

I found myself elatedly cheering the ever-understated genius of Alex Lifeson – alternately soaring through breakers of riffage and seat-planting power-chords to the soft spattered notes of rain-drop acoustic guitar. He can and does spin out these changes of sound on the turn of a dime – hail him.

It was often difficult to know whom to pay attention – Geddy – effortlessly pulling on the strings of his bass as though they were nothing more than big rubber bands, delivering enough thick black booms to level the place; or Neil Peart who is – simply put: Neil Peart. I realized mid-way through the event what a tremendous impression this band made on me way back when...I mean my freaking PIN number is still 2112! (Oops – did I just knowingly reveal that?)

Needless to say it was a great night. Ah yes, the front row seats were great – but I don't think anyone left there without feeling like they got more than their money's worth. Color me rocked out!

There may be those who turn up their nose to the apparent loftiness of Rush (and that in itself is pure irony). But these cats impressed me as plain old down-to-earth rockers who are just damn good at what they do.