
Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by likeatrain - 2008/07/19 11:23

I'm sure JudasPriest will back me up on this - the two of us have been trying to get Stefan to divulge his thoughts on the tour just finished, so far to no avail. So Stefan, if you're out there, at least 2 people would be happy to read your take on the tour. I for one always find your comments interesting and appreciate the knowledge and good taste you bring to discussions. You don't seem to have been posting much recently, so I thought a direct request might be the best way to go. And ,of course, it would be interesting to hear the thoughts of others on the tour, too!

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by JudasPriest - 2008/07/19 14:15

Consider yourself backed up likeatrain....

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by The Wicked Drifter - 2008/07/19 15:08

I support this message.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by stefan - 2008/07/19 16:09

Oh! Now, that's a very kind request. Thank you for considering my opinion ...

As I haven't followed Dylan's touring too closely the last months (I must admit that my interest in his music has taken some time-out) my impressions of the European are not well-founded. I'm sure many other NEPers have listened to these shows more precisely than I have. So here's just some bits and pieces:

- The main quality of the (maybe seven) shows I've heard is that Dylan seems to have enjoyed himself thoroughly. No matter how broken-winded an hoarse his voice sounds, he seems to be in a (comparitively) pretty fine mood.

- His singing often lacks accuracy. He almost never continues an impromptu melody from one line over to the next. Whenever he has found one, he seems to forget it immediately. Most often this has an infavorable effect on the emotional impact of lines and verses.

- The micro he uses hasn't got enough "range" (I don't know if that word is right); if he doesn't sing right into it his voice doesn't come through, so that we get tons of incomplete lines. This also adds to the "inaccuracy" verdict.

- The band's sound hasn't changed all too much, I guess. Again, Denny Freeman sometimes plays magnificent soli and melodic embellishments, sometimes George goes wild (cf. "Watchtower" from the Andorra show) - overall it's all very, very solid. Again, they sound better on fast and rocking songs (the hard-boiled "Modern Times" tunes are becoming better and better) than on mellow ones ("If You See Her" I find especially lame). Then again, there are exceptions to the rule, like "Sugar Baby" from Salzburg.

- The endless alternation of slow and fast songs is as uninspired as it was during the last four years. A "semi-acoustic" set could work wonders.

- Concerning performance quality the shows I've heard were surprisingly varied, though - which is good.

- When I listened to that one version of "Handy Dandy" my mind straggled only after two verses - which isn't good.

- That "fairground version" of "Love Minus Zero" is a delight.

- The band again: I think they don't challenge Dylan enough. He often sounds too "settled", which also means that his singing often refers to rhetorical means. He has to risk to little.

- All in all, a tour that has produced performances as fiery as the ones from Halifax, Helsinki and Bergamo (which has the greatest "Thunder on the Mountain" ever) couldn't have been a bad tour.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by LaughsLikeTheFlowers - 2008/07/19 16:39

Ask and you shall receive!

Thanks, Stefan.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by MarkHibbing - 2008/07/19 17:11

Thanks stefan. Your thoughts are always interesting and include important topics like this:

The band again: I think they don't challenge Dylan enough. He often sounds too "settled", which also means that his singing often refers to rhetorical means. He has to risk to little

I agree completely.

In my opinion they actually sound still too well-rehearsed.

Mr. Freeman isn't a guy who's going wild sometimes like Charlie or Koella did.

They ain't confront Bob enough to force more creativity.

Those spontaneous melodys Donnie likes to invent during a show mostly sound kitschy.

If Bob would give Stu just a little more space in creativity on the guitar (he did already in terms this last tour) it would work better.

I still think they sound too clean for a RockNRoll-Band.

In general I liked the last tour. One of the best tours of this band after U.S.-Spring 2005, Europe-Fall 2005 and U.S.-Fall 2006.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by bobbycat - 2008/07/19 17:50

Agree with everything stefan said. Mark is spot on about the sounds from Donny. And Dylan has to get rid rid of the organ, it just doesn't fit at all. At best it doesn't detract from the music, at worst it nearly destroys it. Nevertheless there were some fine shows this tour and an engaged Dylan.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by The Wicked Drifter - 2008/07/19 20:48

I'll tell you how Bob can fix most of these problems in three words:

Let Donnie solo.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by lenny bruce - 2008/07/20 09:03

The shows Ive heard..... AWFUL. Ill be in Brooklyn.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by lenny bruce - 2008/07/20 09:05

Worst tour ive heard, the Poland show was best . Handy Dandy made me sad.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by trevgibb - 2008/07/20 12:57

Bob needs a new band to freshen things up. The problem with this band is they are amazing on one or two songs and the rest are boring to me at least.

He specifically needs to get a new bass player. He needs a fresh perspective in sound and arrangement. He's been in his comfort zone for too long now.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by JudasPriest - 2008/07/20 14:20

Thanks for sharing your view Stefan, as always an interesting read.

For my money, the tour this year has been good. Vocally, an improvement from Autumn 07 and despite the feeling that his voice deteriorated a bit towards the end of the recent european tour, overall, it's probably in about the same nick as early 07 or maybe even a bit better.

The band remain impressive on certain nights and workmanlike on others. I agree with Drifter, allowing Donnie to solo more would help. I've grown fond of Denny and seeing him at very close quarters in Salzburg reminded me of just how good he can be. That said, the main problem with this band compared to say Campbell/Koella or Campbell/Sexton is that the sound lacks any real 3rd dimensional feel. The sound doesn't project outwards the way previous guitar combinations have. It doesn't feel as confident or have the ability to naturally ground the songs. So the result is that songs like Watchtower don't manage to be quite as apocalyptic as before or Hollis Brown just isn't quite as sinister or menacing. The atmosphere of certain songs is diminished somewhat while still remaining good or solid or competent or very good or whatever. Just lacking that little spark of magic that went before.

A freshening up is desirable and there are two obvious ways to achieve that:

1. Bring in some new musicians to take the sound in a different direction. This has tended to happen every few years and this current band are now into their 4th year. A change might be natural at this time.
 2. He has more or less used the same pool of 50-60 songs for quite some time. He needs to restructure the sets by taking out his song book, rehearsing and adding 15-20 new songs into the mix.
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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by trevgibb - 2008/07/20 17:55

spot on judaspriest

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by likeatrain - 2008/07/20 21:24

Thanks for your views, Stefan - an interesting read, as always. I agree with much of what you say. Your description of the band as 'solid' is especially pertinent - solid, but the music lacks drama. I actually think this band works best on the quieter songs (Moonlight, Horizon, Shelter), and that Freeman plays to his strengths on these. The more up-tempo songs have a tendency to plod.

The approach of this formation seems to be the weaving of repetitive motifs in and out of the songs. When this works, it can be really good - the band sounds like a rhythmic unit, the players' contributions ricochet off one another. In this respect, I think this band reached its peak in Spring 07. Now, it seems that the motifs are too often simply copied, rather than fully integrated into the sound.

The 'solidity' of the band sound, the lack of drama - could this have something to do with the rather strict positioning of each member on stage? The too-strict allocation of a 'job' to individual members? (Denny - all the solos; Donny - do what Bob does on keys; Stu - chords). In a recent interview, Bob said something about not wanting his band to be a 'gang,' and I wonder whether the music doesn't suffer a bit as a result. As to the lack of semi-acoustic material - perhaps Bob doesn't think his keyboard playing would work in such a context, or maybe he feels his (much-damaged) voice would be too exposed. I sometimes think the voice could be part of the reason for the same-old-same-old pool of songs, too - are there some songs now that Bob simply wouldn't risk singing?

As Stefan says, Bob seems to be enjoying himself (most of the time). And - after so much hard work and so many great performances with so many different bands over so many years - perhaps that's what's important now.

Like Judas Priest, I think new players or a changed repertoire could bring about an improvement in the shows. But, for Bob, is it really worth the hassle?

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by JudasPriest - 2008/07/20 22:51

True. He may not feel it's worth the hassle, particularly when the shows are far from bad. Indeed, on occasion, they have been excellent. But if he wants to push on and take them to the next artistic level, change might be the best mechanism by which to get there...

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by josepi - 2008/07/20 23:23

I do think this has gotta be the best leg since the 2005 legs.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by dylans8 - 2008/07/20 23:43

I've been a passionate Dylan fan for a long time. I've collected a lot of shows etc like most here. I have seen him in concert whenever he's been in the UK. I've seen some wonderful performances. The 2000 shows were outstanding. I've always loved Dylan's guitar style especially his acoustic meanderings. I loved his vocals in 1995. I was blown away by his 1984 stuff especially his solo acoustic songs. However I have to confess I didn't enjoy his last few concerts I attended. Dylan playing keyboard with his back to half his audience wasn't too appealing especially if like me I watched his back for 2 hours. I thought the band were OK but a big step down on the previous line up. Dylan now gives the impression of enjoying a jam with his band every night and sometimes he only ever looks at the audience in the line up at the end. Tickets cost a lot of money. I have to confess that if he visits the UK again and he is playing the same way/ same format I won't go. I never thought I'd say that. Dylan perhaps owes people like me nothing he's maybe done enough and more. He's a genius no doubt in my mind but live shows have become a nightly moneyfest for him. When you think of what he could do if he really wanted to. It's such a shame he has not performed solo for so long. I'm afraid he simply disrespects his audience now.

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Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by Bob Zimmerman - 2008/07/21 02:25

The organ can be highly detrimental to the songs, and listening to the tapes, I cant help but wonder how the same song would sound if he'd simply change the setting to piano. (Depending on where you stand at the show though, that can usually be avoided.) I'm not saying the organ should disappear completely, songs like Mobile for instance I feel benefit from the organ, but NOT every G-ddamn song!!!!

Also, he's upsinging again on Pos 4th St (cant remember which tape). I normally have no issues w/ his singing or his voice or anything, but this is VERY annoying.

Aside from that, I have nothing but good things to say about the tour. The comments that started Fall 07, about the band really "coming together", seem to really resonate now, especially compared to 06 and early 07 tapes. I could listen to Denny play scales all day, and I'm pretty sure he would find some way of making that interesting. I just really dig his playing. Donnie is almost criminally underused. I'm very excited he's playing banjo a bit more, but its almost like he's too hesitant and timid on the thing when it comes time to solo. He starts to, and then.....

Go for it Donnie!

As for comparing anyone here to Koella... they are WORLDS apart, and thats a good thing. Koella might have been in the band, but his fingers didnt know it

Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by trevgibb - 2008/07/21 03:37

likeatrain

I think in essence you have said best what the current situation is with Bob. You nailed the description of how his band works.

Re:Stefan/The tour just finished

Posted by JudasPriest - 2008/07/21 22:52

I suspect this bands finest hour will be seen as Modern Times. I know the music is (deliberately) pushed into the background somewhat to allow Bob's (surprisingly wonderful) vocals to shine but it still plays its part and adds flavour and character to the album. The consistent 40's/50's feel is conveyed perfectly throughout.
