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ENTERTAINMENT

Music: Don't You Forget About Simple Minds

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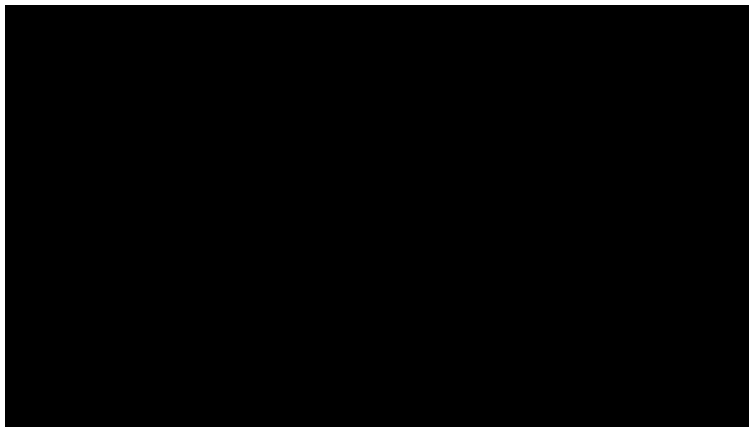
SIMPLE MINDS *** 1/2 out of ****

ROSELAND BALLROOM 10/24/13

The band **Simple Minds** ended their first North American tour in more than a decade with a look back at their greatest period from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. The excuse was a boxed set spanning their career, with both a **2 CD** and a **3 CD version available called *Celebrate*** (the 3 CD version is far preferable, with the strong final disc making up for their fallow period after worldwide success almost swallowed them).

Celebrate they did. This was my first time seeing the band but I'd always heard they were a formidable live act. Indeed, almost without exception, their live versions outclassed the ones they captured on disc some 30 or so years ago when the group launched with 1979's *Life In A Day*. Their world tour continues on November 1 in South Africa with dates through March and a promise on their website for 2015: Simple Minds will tour again!

This was not a show for fanatics looking for obscure B-sides or songs from their less acclaimed face. They began with the fine new single "Broken Glass Park" from the new compilation and never looked back.



"Waterfront" immediately followed, the first of two from my introduction to the band: the very good *Sparkle In The Rain*. (The other was an instrumental version of "Speed Your Love To Me." I'll have to catch them again to hear my favorite from that album, "Up On The Catwalk."

Then came "All The Things She Said," a catchy tune from their stadium-friendly album *Once Upon A Time*, the CD that capitalized on the unexpected worldwide success of "(Don't You) Forget About Me," a one-off pop song for the movie *The Breakfast Club*.

That was followed by a real treat: a cover of The Call's "Let The Day Begin," an anthemic tune very much in the spirit of Simple Minds that was a tribute to the late Michael Been.

It was touching and telling on many levels. The Call was another band with purpose and a serious aura that never achieved blockbuster success a la U2. But they maintained an ardent fan base and their dignity over the years.

Here was Simple Minds, the biggest rock band to ever come out of Scotland. But if circumstances had been slightly different, they might be playing Madison Square Gardens or a football arena rather than a famed but smaller venue. They'd reached for the brass ring -- and grabbed it, *Once Upon A Time* had a string of hits and sold well -- but the Rolling Stones they weren't. This can destroy a band or let them rediscover why they made music in the first place. Clearly, for Simple Minds, it has been the latter.

They're a bigger draw in other countries and their chops proved it. Some bands that aspire to arenas or have played them, can't recalibrate their show to a smaller space. The lead singer of an unknown band can look like a wannabe Bono when making broad gestures and playing to the back of the room when the back of the room is only yards rather than miles away. A big act reduced in scope can appear monolithic. Not Simple Minds. I wish I had credits for the show because their lighting in particular was excellent and far superior to what bands can usually muster for Roseland. It was stadium ready in its subtlety and dramatic effects but they were adjusted well for the stage the band was actually playing on. Their sound mix was excellent: for me, lead singer Jim Kerr's vocals are always slightly buried more in the mix than I would choose, but this has clearly been an aesthetic choice for decades, not the fault of the mixer. The core of the band has always been founding members Kerr and Charlie Burchill (guitarist on tour and co-songwriter on many tunes). But this lineup has been steady for the longest period in the group's history. So this is as Simple Minds a group of musicians as any Simple Minds lineup has ever been and their tightness and power in playing as a group came across wonderfully.

Right after that exceptional cover of "Let The Day Begin," they launched into "Hunter and the Hunted" and "Glittering Prize," two tracks from their masterpiece *New Gold Dream (81-82-83-84)*. Two more would follow but first came an intermission. Yes, 45 minutes into the set they took a brief 15-20 minute break. They returned for another 80 minutes of music, adding up to a substantial two hours of concert. But I don't think I've ever seen a show take a break at such an odd juncture in the evening. At first, looking at that 45 minute block, I assumed they were taking a page from many other veteran acts and beginning the show by playing a classic album in its entirety and then returning for a greatest hits set. (That's actually an idea they might want to tackle, given the fact that their early albums are so rich in material.)

But no, it's just how they stage their shows. Maybe they don't like to break at the one hour mark? Maybe they prefer to build and build towards a finale and that takes 80 minutes? Whatever the reason, it worked perfectly well. The first set was ferocious and satisfying, with both my guest and I exclaiming on the playing of the band, Kerr's voice (which was in great form) and the marvelous lighting.

After the break came 11 more songs, including an instrumental, with *New Gold Dream* opener "Someone Somewhere Summertime" a favorite sing-along for the audience. Like the band, the crowd is older now, which meant for a change that half the audience did NOT spend the entire evening holding their phones in the air to capture video. But the phones did come out for "(Don't You) Forget About Me." This audience was not here just for the few hits the band enjoyed in the U.S. They loved the deep cuts from early albums before that brief success even arrived. Doubtless many of them would say they were sorry about the lure of radio that turned the act briefly into a world-beater with a more "obvious" sound. And yet the night ended on an ecstatic note with "Sanctify Yourself" and "Alive And Kicking" from that every period.

Their new compilation can't avoid the brief stumbling after that commercial success when the band seemed to be imitating U2 rather than influencing them as they had earlier in their career. But the 3 CD set especially shows they've regained their artistic compass and delivered some worthy music in the past 10-15 years. Not that you heard it tonight. The set list as far as I can tell was drawn almost exclusively from songs recorded in 1985 and earlier. That's the beauty of classic tunes: they never feel dated whereas some newer

material might have been performed for the band's sake rather than the fans.

Kerr addressed the crowd and said it had been so long since they came to New York that they "were going to enjoy every minute of it." And they did. He slid and stuttered across the stage in that minimalist, dancing style of his that made the young Kerr seem cool and reserved and the more mature Kerr of today keep from looking foolish. He had style with a minimum of fuss, his vocals were impassioned, their best material sounded as good as ever and the happy crowd was with them all the way. They performed in a style that would have filled a stadium but perhaps for the night everyone -- including the band -- was glad it could be enjoyed in such an intimate setting as this.

And as a final treat, here's the official video for their smash hit from *The Breakfast Club*. You know it's the one you would have looked up online anyway.



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Note: *Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.*

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