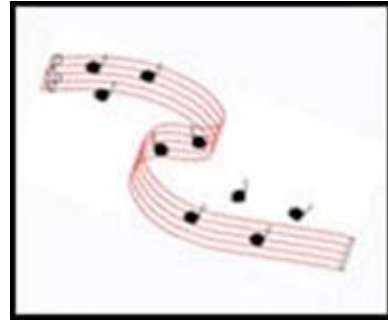


Review: Wailers bring Bob Marley back to life

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Reggae superstar Bob Marley has been dead for nearly 30 years. But his spirit and his sound were resurrected Saturday night when his former backing band the Wailers sold out the Carolina Theatre.

If you haven't seen the band for while, there are some surprises. There are two versions of the Wailers currently on tour. The Original Wailers is a seven-piece group with long-time guitarist Al Anderson and singer /guitarist Junior Marvin, who took over Wailers singing duties in 1981 when Marley died.

The 11-piece ensemble assembled here, billed simply as the Wailers, features only one original member, arranger Aston "Family Man" Barrett.

But when you first heard the voice coming from offstage, you had no trouble believing the Wailers were in the house. It sounded like somebody had either resurrected Marley or recaptured his voice.

But this Marley replacement was not what you'd expect. Elan Atias looked like a frat boy in his sweater and English driving cap, but Marley's voice poured out of him. Discovered by guitarist Anderson, a 19-year-old Atias was tapped to replace singer Marvin in 1996.

Atias had never sung with a band, been on a stage nor had a rehearsal or a sound check before his debut in front of 6,000 people as Marley's replacement. He left in 1999 to go solo, returning in 2007.

With Atias as host, Marley lived again, in spirit and in voice. The crowd got to its feet when Atias came out, and stayed up the rest of the show, swaying to the pulsating rhythms.

The tour's theme is the performance of Marley's ground-breaking 1977 album "Exodus" in its entirety. "So Much Things To Say," "Guiltiness" and "The Heathen" sounded note for note as they did on the album.

There was no room to dance, so the crowd pranced in place like the singers on stage. Atias had the Marley bounce down pat, hopping on an invisible pogo stick, twirling to the music.

Atias worked to the crowd, a tireless cheerleader urging the packed house to celebrate the Marley music with him. The young singer has the same gritty soul timbre to his voice, channeling both the spirit and the sound of his Rastafarian predecessor.

The feeling was often more eerie than Irie. When Atias belted out Marley's "Jammin," you wondered what Marley was doing in this body. By the time the band got to the Wailers classic, "Three Little Birds," with its chorus of "don't worry about a thing/cause every little thing gonna be all right," most of the house had mashed itself in front of the stage, swaying and singing along.

An encore window-rattling rendition of "Redemption Song" had the older crowd members holding up lighters, the younger ones lighting up their areas with cell phones.

The personnel for this retro reggaefest may have shifted, but the feeling was still there. As long as Family Man and Atias draw breath, some version of the Wailers will make sure Bob Marley's name and sound are not forgotten.

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