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## The Wailers blaze through the Carolina Theatre

By Ryan Snyder

A lot has been said about bands that retain their name years after the height of their primary popularity, despite sporting a lineup that nowhere near resembles the original. Lynyrd Skynyrd, for instance, has taken heat over their ever-bending “Rule of Three,” which states that the band must contain three survivors of the infamous 1977 plane crash in order to use the name, though these days only one presently remains in their band. It gets even stickier when you bring the Wailers, who played the Carolina Theatre on Saturday, into the discussion.

Despite not having their own rule regarding membership integrity and rights to the name, the Wailers offer their own brand of confusion with varying lineups over their more than 45 years of existence. The earliest incarnation featured Peter Tosh, Junior Braithwaite, Bunny Livingston and, of course, Bob Marley, though Marley’s name wasn’t initially distinguished from the rest of band. It wasn’t until 1974 that the band evolved into Bob Marley & the Wailers, featuring an entirely different membership other than Marley himself.

Presently, the band tours with but one member from the second era of the Wailers, though it’s arguably one of the most important and well-known reggae musicians of that period.

Bassist Aston “Family Man” Barrett, so named because of his 52 children, led the present incarnation of the Wailers into Greensboro for a tour with the focus of reviving the classic Marley album Exodus. Barrett’s signature deep-dub groove was vital in crafting some of Marley & the Wailers’ best work, including their magnum opus Exodus, though his efforts to pay tribute do seem a bit disingenuous after losing a hugely expensive royalties battle against the Marley estate. The persistence of the current lineup seems all the more muddled with the impending spring tour of an act calling themselves the Original Wailers featuring Al Anderson and Junior Marvin, two more from the second era of the band. It’s obvious that the gory details were completely moot for the mostly sold-out crowd at the Carolina Theatre, as they came to hear an honest recreation of the music of Bob Marley and that’s exactly what they



received. Yvad, who fronted the Wailers for a short period a few years back, opened the show with a stirring acoustic mini-set before the entire band came out to support him on the island-folk “Hole in My Front Pocket.” Yvad departed to a round of applause and the Wailers got the show rolling with the medley of ambiguous jams that’s characteristic of bigger reggae acts. There was no need for a set list for the first half of the show, as anyone with knowledge of Exodus knew exactly how things would progress. The uncannily Marley-esque voice of Jewish- American vocalist Elan Atias carried the words “There’s a natural mystic blowing through the air,” as the singer worked the crowd from offstage to convey the full impact of the lyrics.

The album’s recreation was fairly straight-forward, save for a “What’s Love Got to Do With It” tease in “Waiting In Vain” and some additional finesse sewn into the title track. Barrett and drummer Anthony Watson opened with a darkly subsonic drum-and-bass jam and the band briefly transformed the piece into the exuberant Babylon By Bus classic “Punky Reggae Party,” with Atias beseeching that “It’s a punky reggae party, and I hope you are hardy.”

The audience was on their feet throughout, dancing and grooving as best they could amidst the rows of seating in the historic venue.

The tension and excitement mounted as the album wound down with “Three Little Birds” and finally, the anthemic “One Love/ People Get Ready.” Lighters were lit, hands went up and everyone seemed to agree that we definitely should get together and feel alright. The band bowed and exited the stage, with Atias and guitarist Audley Chisholm returning after a brief holdover. It’s just a shame that a good portion of the crowd cleared out just as the best was yet to come. Saying “this is one off of my solo album” may not be the best way to kick off an encore, which led to another kind exodus with the audience involved. But those who stuck around were in store for good things. After a brief rap by Atias about the United Nations World Food Program and how buying a red bracelet could be a unified hipster display of solidarity in the fight against hunger, he and Chisholm led the crowd in a “Redemption Song” sing-along.

Atias unmistakably implored the Carolina Theatre attendees to “come on, light up the weed” just as the rest of the band rejoined them onstage.

After just one more off of Etias’ solo album, he pimped the WFP lyrically by reminding everyone that “a hungry mob is an angry mob” with “Them Belly Full (But We Hungry).” That was followed by the cheery “Three Little Birds, as a thick cloud of smoke billowing its way to the ceiling testified to the mood in the building.

There’s only one way for a Wailers gig to come to a close, and that’s with the stirring “No Woman No Cry.” The lighters went back up as Atias poured out one of the most emotive of all Marley compositions. The band was introduced, with each of the nine members providing their own short soloist addition to the song’s well-extended bridge. The crowd looked worked and weary at the end, but buoyant for another round of the Wailers, regardless of which version of the band it happened to be.