

Arts & Culture

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Performance

Beatles, Pink Floyd tributes hit the right notes

By David Cannon
Sentinel Arts Critic

For a venue like the Strathmore Music Center, it would be great to host the Beatles, but time has already claimed two of its members. It would be a blast to host Pink Floyd, but the members of that group are not speaking much to one another. You would say case closed, but humans are ingenious creatures and have come up with next best thing.

Tribute bands are becoming more popular and more respected as that era of classic rock recedes into the past, and last week Strathmore hosted two of the best in the business. While the group Rain - the Beatles Experience was a blast, it was the Australian Pink Floyd Group that was the true surprise.

The four members of Rain (plus an extra keyboardist) go out of their way to imitate the Beatles and the '60s. Using real and manipulated film clips, they mimic the heady early years of the Beatles with costumes and sets recreating those famous *Ed Sullivan Show* performances. Later using wigs, psychedelic costumes, and vintage clips, they enter the post *Sgt. Pepper Lonely Heart's Club Band* world in all its dizzying diversity.

Let me say the four members do a great job looking and sounding like the Fab Four on stage. As the evening progressed they went from those stark early Sullivan sets and sounds such as "Twist and Shout" to the more conjectural late concerts complete with light show, fog effects, and audience participation.

It's a true blast from the past, but given the Beatles vast catalog of great songs and only two hours on stage, major omissions abound.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STRATHMORE

The Australian Pink Floyd Group performs their light show during a tribute concert at the Strathmore Music Center.

They had to do "Yesterday" and Paul lookalike Joey Curatolo did a great solo acoustic version with help from the audience. They had to do "Eleanor Rigby," except they didn't. In fact that critical transition period of "Rubber Soul"/"Revolver" was largely absent here. (On a personal note - am I the only person who remembers and loves "Norwegian Wood"?)

The group did a great job with large portions of the seminal *Sgt. Pepper*, and rarely has "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" sounded this trippy. They also did large segments of *Abbey Road* but I do not recall anything from *Let It Be*. On the plus side, Rain did not slavishly play just the big hits. Yes, they did "Revolution" and "Girl" but they gave time to lesser-known numbers like "That Boy" and the later "Mother Nature's Son."

This was a great recreation of the Beatles career, which really did change popular music

for decades to come. Few groups understood those lessons as well as Pink Floyd. Rarely has a group become so huge on such a small body of work as Floyd. Their early trippy albums were enjoyable but then came the seminal *Dark Side of the Moon*, which stayed on the Billboard charts for nearly a decade. This album and the three that followed it, climaxing with the huge bestseller *The Wall* are classic Floyd, and they reveal a group that

seemed haunted by their reclusive original founder, the legendary Syd Barrett.

Whatever, this Australian group understands Floyd and what the fans want. They opened the show performing *Dark Side* completely. After intermission were excerpts from the other classic Floyd albums. The group did two numbers from the earlier albums, including a totemic "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," and two later songs (including their last hit "Learning to Fly"), but 90 percent of their playbill came from those wildly popular four classic albums.

When you watched them, this group of musicians didn't look a bit like Floyd. Close your eyes and their voices sounded reasonably close to the originals, and a special nod to the three female backup singers who were excellent throughout, especially the virtuoso "Great

Gig in the Sky." But their music was nearly a dead ringer for Floyd. The lack of orchestration made parts of "Comfortably Numb" sound a little thin; but they had the sound effects, the snippets of dialogue and those languid melodic lines down pat.

Now open your eyes again and this group spent the time and money to recreate those legendary Floyd sets and light shows. Strathmore is a concert hall so you usually do not talk about lighting, but here it was crucial with the constant use of lasers and fog effects, extensive use of film and animation on several background screens, and meticulously choreographed lighting effects. It was an amazing stage performance, both musically and visually.

Plus the group did not take all of this too seriously. They loved to tweak the concept and remind everyone they were from Australia. Let's just say kangaroos made more than one appearance.

The Strathmore Presents series continues with Jethro Tull on Dec. 3 and the Washington Bach Consort performing Bach's Christmas Oratorio on Dec. 7. Future presentations include Anne Murray on March 18, Brian Stokes Mitchell on April 4 and the world premier of Dinorock's latest family production on March 29.

For more information, call 301-581-5100 or visit their Web site at www.strathmore.org.

Australian Pink Floyd Group

★★★★

Rain

★★★

Strathmore Music Center

Broadway Bound with a dose of dysfunction

By David Cannon
Sentinel Arts Critic

Neil Simon might be the Rodney Dangerfield of playwrights, but he started gaining more respect when his autobiographical play *Brighton Beach Memoirs* won a slew of awards. But *Memoirs* was the start of a trilogy, and while that play and its follow up *Biloxi Blues* are regularly revived, the final part of this trilogy is less frequently seen.

Silver Spring Stage is currently giving us a strong performance of this final installment *Broadway Bound*. Fans of *Brighton Beach* will be in familiar territory, especially with the character of Eugene Jerome, who is basically a stand-in for Simon himself. Other family members have their part to play as we watch Eugene and his brother Stan slowly break into show business.

That's the humorous aspect of the show, and Jamie Driskill as Eugene does a good job

addressing the audience directly at times. The brothers quibble as they try to write a sketch with Eugene distracted by a girl he just met. There is also Ken Lechter as Eugene's Grandfather Ben, an aging socialist who is hilarious whenever he tries to tell Eugene a joke (and usually fails miserably).

This typical Simon bantering humor hides the fact that *Broadway Bound* is really a family drama. While Eugene jokes that he doesn't need to write anything - just sell people tickets to watch his family, it hides the fact that things are not going smoothly in the Jerome household. While the two boys are starting to succeed in show business, their parents' marriage is crumbling around them.

It is a play of extremes, but director Norman Seltzer and his talented cast capture and integrate these varied moods very well. Linda Moore and Norm Gleichman as the parents can go at it with an angry weariness of two opponents doing this battle all over again, while

Moore can turn around with Driskill's Eugene and do a warmly nostalgic story about a dance she will remember her entire life.

Andrew Greenleaf's set design nicely suggests several rooms on several floors on Silver Spring's intimate stage, Sonya Okin's properties and Sandy Eggleston's costuming detail middle class America soon after World War II. Also, the actors performing that little radio play in the second act and Carole Preston as Blanche, the one family member who turned out quite successful are worth noting.

Broadway Bound is a tricky show to pull off. Few comedies suddenly open up into such serious territory, but rarely does a family drama end up being this funny. Even more than *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, Simon is deftly mixing styles and genres here. I could see some of the family arguments being more heated, but that might have disrupted the careful balance of moods in this production. It works very well as is, so let me leave well enough alone.

With *Broadway Bound*, Simon says goodbye to his fictional alter ego Eugene. We've seen Eugene as a youngster in the Depression, then in the army during World War II, and now on the verge of his adult career just as America is coming of age. Perhaps it says something about Simon's own newfound writing maturity that this trilogy ends on both a positive and negative note, and somehow they both fit.

Broadway Bound continues at Silver Spring Stage through Dec. 2. For more information, call 301-594-6036 or visit their Web site at www.ssstage.org.

Broadway Bound

★★★

Silver Spring Stage