

Bruce Springsteen, Sleep Train Pavilion in Concord, June 6, 2006

Even at the age of fifty-six, Bruce Springsteen never ceases to amaze. His three-hour long show at the Sleep Train Pavilion in Concord, which in classic Springsteen fashion began an hour late (but then again, he is the Boss), included the majority of the album *We Shall Overcome*, covers of other appropriate songs – among them, “Rag Mama Rag” and “Bring Them Home” – and some good old Springsteen classics.

Bruce’s humor shined through in his willingness to talk to the crowd between songs. After playing his opening song, “John Henry,” Springsteen turned to the audience, saying, “So, I’ve got to ask y’all a question. Where the fuck are we? I mean, San Francisco’s practically another state. Here it’s hills, hills, hills...” Bruce conceded before playing “Jesse James” that “The details are right, but the rest is bullshit,” and he cited his enjoyment of “Erie Canal” as being because it’s one of the only love songs to a mule. He noted that following the release of “Erie Canal” were several songs including mules, and they eventually killed what he called “the mule genre.”

Springsteen and the band with whom he is touring showed tremendous musical chemistry in alternating between album versions and improvisation. Many openings were also made for the other musicians to perform solos, and Bruce plugged the albums of his fellow guitarist and vocalist. Many of the songs from the album were extended and often more powerful but otherwise close to the original versions. “My Oklahoma Home” was one song that was far from a favorite on the album, yet was considerably more poignant in the context of the Katrina disaster in New Orleans, where he played about a month ago.

Bruce’s original music took on new twists, with the tone of the album incorporated into them. “Atlantic City” took on a Cajun feel, “Johnny 99” was dramatically altered, and “Devils and Dust,” a tour premier, proved to be one of the more powerful moments of the concert in spite of its transformation into more of a rock song compared with its original form.

In referring to one of the band members as the man whose dad taught him to play the guitar, Springsteen jokingly said that the band member and his father were more often seen playing the accordion and as such, he came close to playing that rather than the guitar. He then defensively said, “Not that there’s anything wrong with the accordion... I, for one, find it quite sexy...”

Though the album was released only five weeks ago, the audience was familiar with all of the songs performed, and sang along loudly – often at Bruce’s request in attempt to maximize audience participation – particularly among album favorites “Old Dan Ducker,” “Erie Canal,” and “O Mary Don’t You Weep.” His haunting performances of “Eyes on the Prize” and “We Shall Overcome” furthered the social justice and civil rights themes on which he concentrated in performing this tour, and “How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live,” to which he adapted the verses, brought into play the financial struggles of those coping in hurricane-struck regions.

“Pay Me My Money Down” concluded the first part of the concert and featured guest musician Joan Baez, after which Bruce launched into the encores. Bruce’s performance of “Bring them Home” did not require that he say a political prologue – it was, in itself, a call to action from a man known to stand up for social justice. Springsteen concluded with the oft-performed “When the Saints Go Marching In,” after which the band took its bows and departed, and while that was officially the end of the concert, with Springsteen you never know. In closing, he promised to return now that he “knows where you bastards are.” Given the enthusiasm of the crowd, thousands of fans will likely be anxiously awaiting news of when this return to California will be.

- Miranda Yaver