Joy and pain, all in a Rush

Review • Themes of loss – the emotional cornerstone of the trio’s latest album – tinge its first area concert in five years.

By ANDREW TUTTLE
The Orange County Register

Only a Rush fan can sit through three hours of Rush. And legions of the devoted came to watch their heroes Monday in the band’s first Southern California appearance in five years and first ever at Staples Center in Los Angeles.

The near-capacity crowd of 15,000 watched Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart crank through a 28-song set with little fanfare but plenty of flair.

Rush kicked things off with the tiresome “Tom Sawyer,” just about its only song played on local radio anymore. Though one of Rush’s biggest tunes and arguably the one that put the band on the map, perhaps it’s time to wish it well and pick up a tune long ago forgotten, even by fans. “Entre Nous”? “Jacob’s Ladder”? “World Man” followed, old favorites that sound as fresh as they did when first played in the early 1980s.

Perhaps the most important question of the night was whether Rush would stand the test of time. The band has much of his “Vapor Trails” material, during the first half of the concert. There was a 20-minute intermission after about 70 minutes. “One Little Victory,” the first single off the new album, was an explosive start – complete with pyrotechnics – to the second, longer set. Three songs later, Rush had played the inquisitive “Ceiling Unlimited” and rocking “Secret Touch” and the new album was merely a vapor.

Rush seemed eager to simply get the new material out of the way and get on with the show. “Vapor Trails” has many gems worth playing. But if this was the low point of the night, there wasn’t much to complain about. Because even Rush knows sometimes it’s overlooked stellar songs, which is exactly how Lee introduced “Between Sun and Moon,” from “Counterparts.”

Lifeson played a spine-tizzling solo for “Bravado,” something he’s done since the “Roll the Bones” tour in 1990-91. “Vital Signs” was a prodigal son easily welcomed back by the crowd.

And, what would a Rush concert be without a seven-minute drum solo by the master of percussion? Peart drew upon three decades of solo work and added some new flavors that had wanna-be air drummers trying to catch up.

Giving Peart a much-deserved rest after the solo, Lee and Lifeson did something new. Seated, the two played classical guitar and sang “Resist,” from “Test For Echo” – two camp leaders singing songs around a fire, but with the ability to hold 15,000 in silence and awe.

And, though Peart spent much of his “Vapor Trails” writing on his emotional recovery, the evening was summed up by the crowd and band favorite “The Pass.”

“Someone set a bad exam – prior who lost the will to fight,” Lee sang as if talking directly to Peart.

“Don’t turn your back and slam the door on me.”

*Contact Tuttle at (714) 704-3730 or atuttle@ocregister.com*