

A Knight at the Opera

Written by Jack Sparacino
Tuesday, 14 May 2019 14:05



"Ladies and Gentlemen. I guess that takes in most of you. This is the opening of a new opera season, a season made possible by the generous checksof Mrs. Claypool. [Applause] I am sure the familiar strains of Verdi's music will come back to you tonight, and Mrs. Claypool's checks will probably come back in the morning. And now on with the opera. Let joy be unconfined. Let there be dancing in the streets, drinking in the saloons and necking in the parlor." —
Groucho Marx as Otis B. Driftwood in
"A Night at the Opera"
(Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1935)

Boston Garden, now TD Garden after a bank, is a monument to sports, the arts, circuses, ice shows and more. John F. Kennedy gave a speech there in 1960. With a seating capacity of 19,580 the joint can get pretty loud. Make that deafening, at least for the Celtics and Bruins.

And for Cher, né Cherilyn Sarkisian, aka The Goddess of Pop. Born in 1946 in El Centro, California two hours east of San Diego, she's been a star seemingly forever. Records, television, movies, you name it. Everyone knows her on sight, festooned in Hollywood fairy tale fashion splendor. Imagine Lady Gaga designing her outfits with an assist from Elton John.

My son and ace wingman Jack and I went to see this feathered asteroid last month at the Garden. We got there early and were mosh pitted by an enormous, raucous crowd. About 75%

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women, virtually all of them white and dressed to PARTY. Many arrived at their seats sloshing the \$15 beers sold there. We saw no one munching on the \$10.50 hotdogs or bargain basement \$5 peanuts. Hey, too messy! Up the escalator, we ran into Sonny and Cher wannabes and grabbed a photo. I'm the one who looks dazed and confused (apologies to Led Zeppelin).

We arrived at our floor seats just in time, the first row in our section. Out burst the opening act, Nile Rodgers and CHIC. Mr. Rodgers' show is no Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. It is cataclysmically loud. Endless. The crowd loved it even though I was probably the only one Rodgers' age. Then came a very long intermission. Off went the sparkled ladies for more beer. As they returned, some young fellow cascaded down one of the stairways dancing to the music and they went ever more nuts and forget the \$5 kind. Jack and I loved it, too, a free show within a show. Hard to tell if he was part of the act or maybe just a bashful guy who just dumped his shrink. Whatever.

At long last the super-diva herself floated down to the stage. She was costumed from another planet and the *Here We Go Again* tour's main act was underway. Buckle up, Earthlings. She sang many of her standards, including "The Beat Goes On" and "Fernando." Her dance troupe was terrific, Broadway-esque if not operatic. Athletic, sculpted, glorious. The set design for this show is resplendent, only lacking a Navy flyover and Kentucky Derby horses, though they did have a huge faux elephant that Cher rode around on. Yikes.

So much for the good news. As Cherworld.com noted three years ago, *"Overall Classic Cher was a rehash of her prior 3 concert tours and diehard fans might be disappointed at the lack of new content. If you have seen all her shows on DVD and in person save your money because not a lot of imagination or thought has gone into creating new exciting content, mixing around the setlist or adding new songs. If you love 'Classic Cher' same ole, same ole then go for it and enjoy her while she can still do it at age 70."*

Many similar audience rants can be found on-line along with even more raves (kudos, Margaret!).

□

I agree with some critics on specific points. My biggest disappointment was that the show is extremely overproduced. Aside from the volume being set at Apollo liftoff, ok nuclear blast, it is just plain difficult to disentangle Cher's once (and perhaps still) wonderful voice from all the overdubbing, apparent auto-tuning, collateral noise, pyrotechnics, and audience din. The din of course is to her credit. Who wants a bunch of middle aged fans out for a great time to sit there meditating while they crochet booties for their grandchildren? Then we have the matter of Cher

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pacing around during a long monologue talking about... nothing in particular. To her credit, she was self-effacingly charming as she referred to her age (73). Building to a crescendo of mock modesty, she called out “What’s *your*granny doing tonight?” Touché. The crowd roared.

Some of us could have also done without the barrage of huge videos of Days of Cher Past, many of which of course featured her performing with Sonny. At times it was hard to figure out who was lip synching who but again, it didn’t look like too many people cared. Hey, can you haul your sequined butt up the stairs and get us some more beers? ‘You’ll hear the show all the way. Cheryl, I *said*...’

All that aside, Jack and I had a fine time and wouldn’t have missed it, kind of like watching Lindberg land in Paris (ok, maybe the 50th time on video). It was an experience, as my dad would have said, and how many of those do you really get in life? And if there’s such a thing as joy contagion, well I got it in spades. Uh, feathers. Our ears pounding, we left a few minutes early and beat the crowd exiting this grand cathedral of entertainment.

Out on the street we saw a cop dancing and ‘singing’ to the music inside. Ba-ba-ba-ba, ba-bop-ba-ba-bop-ba-ba. We called for an Uber and crossed the street. On the corner lurked a t-shirt vendor. Five seven, black, about 45. He was selling special Cher t-shirts that read “Here We Go Again Tour” and included her image and tour dates. Huh, I thought, those look nice.

“Do you have a 2X large?”

“Lemme see, uh, here’s one. Twenty dollars.”

“Ten.” My inner knight rose to the occasion.

“Twenty.”

“Forget it.”

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(Groans) “OK 15.”

“Ten.”

“Oh man, I’m losing money, you can’t . . .”

“Ten.”

“No way man. OK ten.”

“Here’s two fives.”

“Hey (bleep) what about a tip?”

“No.”

“%\$^&*\$#\$”

“\$%^#\$@ (knight talk for get a life)”

“& ^*#@\$\$@# (scram?)”

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Our Uber arrived just in time. Off we went. What a fine opera.

What a night.