

arts

U2 turns big-O into big zoo via satellite

by Bruce Gilchrist

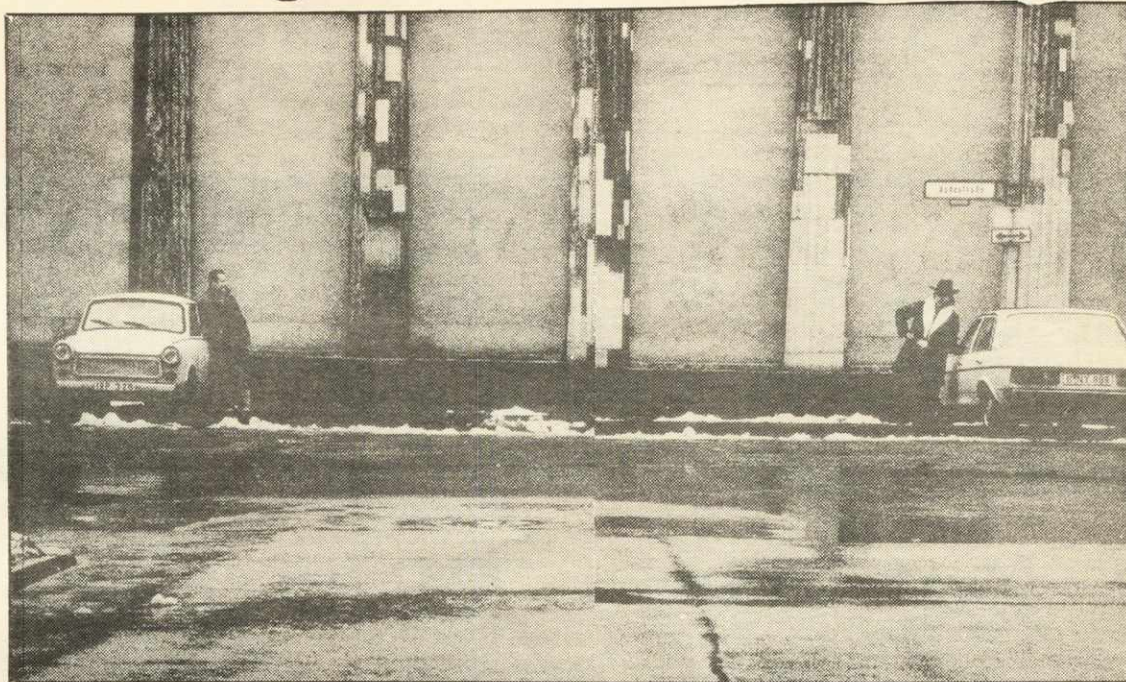
Not everything is as it appears. With the August 30th U2 concert at the Big-O in Montreal, this statement took on greater meaning. Without bothering to inform non-locals, the concert was moved ahead three days to the 27th. Normally U2 restricts double meanings to its songs. Nonetheless, by the time all was said and done, an early excursion from Halifax was rewarded with U2's affirmation as the best band in the world.

Although the ticket stated the show began at 8:00 pm, the first act of the evening, the much touted Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, had completed its set by the time the seats were found (7:50 pm). This was unfortunate in that DHoH's brand of music complements U2's new "alternative" sound while the band's theme associated with TV, highlights the focus of the U2 ZooTV tour. Compounding this misfortune was the second act, Primus. Sounding like

Soundgarden on major tranquilizers, Primus (unwittingly?) encouraged several persons in the surrounding area to resort to chemical stimuli to endure the lengthy monotony.

All was finally well, though, when U2 finally appeared at 9:30, welcomed by a stupendous standing ovation from 45 000 people. As U2 started with the crackling opening chords of "Zoo Station", people scanned the bizarre paraphernalia on the huge stage before them. There were about twelve transmitter towers reaching up to fifty feet above the stage, several two story high screens, dozens of various sized TVs scattered around, two shells of cars filled with spotlights that were being moved about on cranes over heads of the audience, and a giant red and green neon sign reminding us that this was the 'ZooTV' tour.

In the early stages of the concert, the sound wasn't particularly great. U2 had a hard time competing with the constantly shrieking crowd and the reverb coming from the plastic



You've got *Achtung Baby*, uh-huh!

orange roof of the Big-O. The band played its way through six songs off *Achtung Baby*, the new album. Among these, "The Fly", "One", and "Mysterious Ways" (which featured a belly dancer "shakin' the thang" on a runway stage into the audience) got the best reception. Between songs, Bono chatted a bit and played with his TV remote control. The TV screens, which had been displaying a real time camcorder view of the concert, were now flipping around the local stations, drawing cheers of recognition from the partisan crowd. It then went on to video-tape of George Bush and Dan Quayle making asses

of themselves.

Then it happened. U2 broke into the opening of "New Years Day". The sound was miraculously improved and the crowd's screaming reached a new peak as the band ventured into familiar territory, an "old" U2 song. The concert in earnest had begun. The band then moved off of the main stage and onto a platform at the end of the runway. It was on this tiny stage that U2 broke into an acoustical set featuring "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For", "Running to Stand Still", "When Love Comes to Town", "Tryin' to Throw Your Arms Around

the World" (with spontaneous lyrics), and a version of "Angel of Harlem" that broke into ABBA's "Dancing Queen". The acoustical set also featured a much appreciated Quebecois singer (and U2 record producer) Daniel Lanois.

After this U2 raced back to the main stage and blasted through "Sunday Bloody Sunday", and "Silver and Gold", followed by Bono trying to phone Brian Mulroney three times (three busy signals), before making do with a thirty foot high TV screen image of the PM to jeer at. "Where the Streets Have No Name" and "Red Hill Mining Town" were next before U2 ended the main show with a ferocious and extra-long version of "Bullet the Blue Sky". "Bullet" was easily the best song of the night and the TV screens were filled with angry images of burning crosses that hushed the crowd in a blazing spectacle.

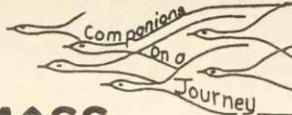
"30 foot screens..."

For the lengthy encore, the crowd was electrified with "Pride" featuring a Martin Luther King speech on the TV screens, "Ultraviolet (Light My Way)", and then with "With or Without You", and "All I Want Is You". A dirge-like "Love Is Blindness" and Elvis's "Are You Lonesome Tonight" ended the grand finale.

By the end of the night, all in the audience were certainly pleased, if not really blown away. Although the *Achtung Baby* stuff didn't go over as well (due to lack of recognition?), U2 left no doubts that they are still the reigning band of the times. If there are any complaints they would be that the "new" stuff relies more on instrumental sound than pure vocal force, and that the Big-O (or any 60 000 seat stadium) is just too big to hold a concert with the height of sparkling sound demanded in the age of CD technology.

All in all, it was a terrific trek, and I hope that not too many people missed out because of the date change.

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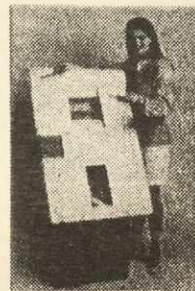
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