

During the past summer Edmonton has finally had some fine concerts. This was to be expected for we have been blessed with a concert hall that will hold about 15,000 people. The Coliseum has put us on the concert map and promoters were quick to use it for we have now had the likes of Stevie Wonder, Alice Cooper, The Doobie Brothers and the Beach Boys in our fair town. Here I will attempt to give an overview of the concerts this summer, and any bands I may have missed were because I couldn't attend all of the concerts that came here. So, here goes....

Concert Review of the Summer

by Dave Garrett

Paul Williams

Though quite middle of the road, Paul Williams has always impressed me as one of the best love song writers around. With songs for the Carpenters and Three Dog Night to his credit, as well as several major hits of his own, one expected a highly professional show. It arrived, complete with back up by a large orchestra.

With the words, "The Hobbit has come to Edmonton," Williams moved through a fine selection of his songs. Between songs he proved entertaining with stories and jokes about his height (very short) and his many exploits in the entertainment business. Paul Williams left one with the impression that he was a very honest, sentimental soul, who loved to write songs about people in love. It was a pleasant evening all around. (P.S. This was an ITV TV concert, so it should be on the tube sometime.)

Alice Cooper

The legendary Alice Cooper was seriously injured three days before the Edmonton concert, and this proved to be the major flaw in an incredibly professional show. The tickets said "Alice Cooper Show", and that is precisely what we got, a show.

Nicely warmed up by Suzi Quatro, the audience waited in silent anticipation for Cooper. His back-up band (all Canadian, by the way) came on stage and jammed for what seemed ages before moving into "Welcome to my Nightmare". But alas Cooper himself did not appear. Instead the show continued with the band and the troupe of dancers providing the entertainment. All manner of strange things appeared before the audiences eyes. Dancing skeletons, complete with hats and canes did a honky tonk number. Bizarrely dressed dancers leaped in and out of strange places, like giant toy boxes.

Finally as the band played the opening from "Only Women Bleed," Alice Cooper appeared on a cobweb covered bed. Working his way through "The Black Widow", "Steven" and others from his "Nightmare" album it was obvious that he was in quite a bit of pain. He was constantly disappearing from stage or leaning on things to relieve the pain.

The rest of the entourage did an excellent job of taking up the slack where Cooper obviously couldn't perform. This led to one of the highlights of the concert, a guitar war between the two guitarists. Staring each other down and brandishing their guitars like axes, they managed to play some mighty fine licks.

After playing through "Welcome to my Nightmare" Cooper played a few of his earlier hits, growing weaker, eventually singing only while sitting. Finally in defeat, he looked off stage and was helped out into a waiting ambulance. Alice Cooper left with a promise to return and make up for an unfortunately short show.

Jeff Beck and Commander Cody

Other than the Beach Boys, this was the only "Coliseum of Stars" concert I saw. It turned out to be an impressive show. The evening started off with a set by Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen. It was obvious that a good part of the audience had come to see Cody. The cowboy hats and other garb of country and western fans was in abundance. They, and the rest of the audience were not in the least disappointed. Cody proved to be much more than a fine country band, but a very tight rock 'n roll band. The audience was most definitely impressed for they were called back for two encores, a surprising thing for a warm up band to do.

After a brief pause to change the stage, the house went dark and the stage was bathed in deep red light. A moment, and Jeff Beck strode confidently on stage. Using his two giant Marshall amps to full advantage, Beck proved that he still loved loud, enthusiastic music.

The music came almost entirely from his most recent album, "Blow by Blow." Though there were regular calls for Yardbird material, the farthest he went back was to his last band, "Beck, Bogart, and Appice." During Stevie Wonder's "Superstitious", he used a fancy device to make his guitar talk. Though Beck did at times get a bit carried away with his avant-garde guitar playing, he was usually tight and precise. In one blues piece in particular, he shone through with all of the amazing musicianship that has made him one of the deans of the guitar world.

It is too bad that the band that Beck had playing with him didn't do him justice. They were only tight some of the time, and the only energy came from Beck, and in a drunken sort of way, the drummer. The gentleman on keyboards seemed obsessed with that chunky, rhythm, wah-wah synthesiser sound of Stevie Wonder. On a short piano solo he tried to mix jazz and boogie styles together and failed miserably. As for the bassist, one quickly gave up trying to figure out what he was up to. What ever it was it was not appropriate.

After working themselves through a fine set of music (with the above mentioned exceptions) Beck and band left. They were quickly returned by an enthusiastic audience for two encores. Then with a few words of thanks and the patented Beck grin, the superstar was gone.

The Beach Boys

Nostalgia!!! Direct from the sand, sun and surf of California, the Beach Boys took Edmonton by storm. They rushed onto their stage, complete with green carpeting, shrubbery and four giant palm trees. They then cruised through enough old Beach Boy hits to keep any fanatic happy.

They had the audience in their hands right from their first song, "Sloop John B.", right through to their second encore, with "Fun, Fun, Fun." On "Fun, Fun, Fun" an amazing thing happened. They had the audience singing along with the final harmony of the song (remember the high soprano stuff at the end). They never ceased to please, playing song after song of good time music. "Here is the song you all came to hear," claimed Mike Love, as the introduction was being played for "California Girls" (ah, but it's true, isn't it). A song of "tremendous sociological implications" turned out to be "Little Deuce Coupe". Actually the best summary that could be made is that it was the Beach Boys; what more could I say?

Donovan

Appearing almost as from a time machine, Donovan, one of the most outspoken prophets of the sixties, wandered onto the Jubilee Auditorium stage all by himself, to sing.

The concert provided a fabulous chance for all the children of the sixties to get dressed up in the various uniforms of the times. Everyone was walking around in a very content, peaceful mood. Donovan, the man of peace from the English countryside, was obviously having an effect on the audience.

After a number of tunes to get himself and the audience warmed up, he opened up and really began to communicate. He would usually start a song off with a little story, to introduce it. Accompanying himself on the guitar he told of many adventures, like being the first star to be busted, flashbacks about times when protest was "in", one could sense a certain kind of sanity that it had all passed. In many of his more recent songs he spoke of the old days when apathy was replaced by social consciousness. He expressed compassion for the left overs of the revolution. Yet, through all of the reflection, Donovan transmitted a special happiness and contentment. A fine example was a song called "Happiness Runs." In this song he had the audience singing a lovely round, with the guys singing one part, the girls another, and himself a third.

Donovan largely presented a trip back into the "Good old days"; most of the material being his old hits. More important, though, Donovan presented himself. This self turned out to be a very special, magical person. It was so easy to be drawn into the peaceful aura that he created. Let's hope that there will always be people like him. I think that even the "Establishment" would want it that way.

Bachman Turner Overdrive

I am really going to stick my neck out and say that I thought the concert was good. BTO is the kind of group that reviewers love. They are so easy to criticize. I am not about to say that BTO are the new Beatles or anything. I am not going to compare them to the musical perfection of Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Genesis and the other progressive bands. What I am going to say is that BTO is one hell of a rock 'n roll band.

It is very easy to claim that BTO display very little talent in playing the music that they do, but then how much talent does anyone need to play basic rock. There will always be a market for basic music, after all everyone can't be a Stravinsky. Although I generally appreciate the higher forms of rock music, I like a lot of BTO, because I think that everyone needs a chance to clap their hands and stomp their feet.

Justifications aside, on to the concert itself. Now it is time to do some constructive criticizing. A disappointing thing was that they played "Rolling Down the Highway" first, for I feel it is their best song. It took the bank as a whole about twenty minutes to get warmed up and into the music. So, the first bunch of songs suffered. Only Rob Bachman, the drummer, and Blair Thorton (he is the thin guitarist) really showed any energy right from the start. Rob Bachman was so into bashing out the BTO beat that when the group was called out for their second encore he was nearly out of control with energy, leaping all over the stage whipping the audience up even more. C.F. Turner and Randy Bachman, the central figures in the band took the longest to warm up. Turner at times even looked downright bored. Once going, though, they had more than enough energy.

The whole concept of the show was quite simple. It consisted of three guitarists rocking and stomping around the stage, chunking out very loud rock 'n roll chords. Up on his stand Rob Bachman never stopped, thumping and crashing, or brandishing a drumstick in the air like a wand, taunting the audience on. The energy and rhythm were contagious. You very quickly found your foot moving in time with the beat of the music. The band whipped up the audience, and they in turn fed energy back to the band, the whole thing climaxing in an outstanding rendition of an old BTO classic, "Takin' Care of Business."

Bachman Turner Overdrive is currently one of the most sought after bands in the world. They are definitely the biggest act ever to come out of Canada. With the show they put on here, I think that they successfully proved why they are so popular. Though they very rarely satisfy the critics, because all they play is basic rock 'n roll, they do play it very well and are making a fine living at it.

The Long Rock Summer