

# Dudes, sounding like a legend

## HEROIC CLASSIC ROCK BAND AEROSMITH MAKES A POWERFUL SANTA BARBARA DEBUT AT THE BOWL

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Review

**P**retty much from stern to stern, from the song “Let the Music Do the Talking” through to the final encore of “Sweet Emotion,” Tuesday night’s smashing Aerosmith show at the Santa Barbara Bowl was a thing of exuberant awe and pleasure, with never a dull moment. Despite the sixtysomething

age of the players, the rocking night generally conjured up the musical question: “what’s age got to do with it?”

At this point in the Boston-baked band’s 44-year history, after various dips and internal conflicts and the usual substance abuse blackout periods, the group seems fully alive and happy to be so, and their first performance in Santa Barbara fully affirmed the notion of their being on the short list of great American rock ‘n’ roll bands.

The sold-out show opened up with late ‘80s/early ‘90s band Living Colour, an unusually virtuosic band of players, including fusion-flavored guitar wizard Vernon Reid (who also played with jazz drummer Ronald Shannon

Jackson’s Decoding Society), bassist Doug Winbush and drummer Wil Gathoun. Porent singer Corey Glover wrangled his unique gospel-meets-rocker intensity, up through the set-closing greatest hit “Cult of Personality,” and ran up into the Bowl aisles, pressing flesh and exciting the throng.

Of course, on this night, most all eyes, ears and anticipatory sense were locked onto Aerosmith, which hit the stage like the friendly conquering rock heroes they are. Steven Tyler — who playfully satirizes the band’s own post-glam sense of style with the great, cheeky

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or three, after peeling off a few tasty blues harp solos during the night.

Now 67, he remains a controlled wild man, an archetype of the old school rock band front man who knows how to work a microphone and a mic stand as play and prop, and also the stage itself, strutting the breadth of the stage front. As if naturally owning this evening’s stage real estate, he held up a far wall of the Bowl stage pavilion at one point, languishing in a spotlight as the band rocked on. In short, he has that rock star ethos paradox in ample supply, coming across as both a friend and ally to all us mere, sweating mortals and conveying a larger than life persona.

But this band is not all about the lead singer, and never has been. Founding guitarist/co-writer Joe Perry is like Keith Richards is to the Rolling Stones’ Mick Jagger. His solid rock guitar work, sometimes in riff-swapping teamwork with fellow guitarist Brad Whitford, fed and also drew on the textbook rock guitar sound.

Drummer Joey Kramer is a powerful force at the center of the band sound, and he cooked up an



Helena Day Breeser/News-Press

**Aerosmith play a heroic set during their Santa Barbara debut at the bowl.**

inventive, muscular drum solo, nestled between “Toys in the Attic” and “Rag Doll,” a nod to the core ingredient of the Aerosmith sound, the blues. Mr. Perry was the blues man of that moment, on guitar and voice, and he preceded it by feeding our sense of Santa Barbaran pride and self-love: “This is an amazing place. I’m gonna call my wife and say ‘I think we need to look for a house here.’” Enter the blues.

For cover material at the Bowl, the band — ever tough but hooky, and plugged into the pop-R&B-hard rock style menu — fittingly touched on both the pop-rockish Fleetwood Mac tune “Stop Messin’ Around” as well as Rufus Thomas’ “Walkin’ the Dog.”

Late in the show, the big hits started rolling into the setlist, starting with “Walk This Way,” introduced by Mr. Tyler not from its status as a ‘70s single smash, but

as a life-saving career-rejuvenator in the version done with Run DMC in 1986. The facilitator for that scene-bridging project was iconic producer Rick Rubin, who was in the house this night.

For encores, Mr. Tyler sat down to a grand piano (soon to become a pedestal for Mr. Perry and the singer) and sidled his way through a simple version of “Home Tonight” before settling into “Dream On.” Like another famous Aero-ballad heard this night, “I Don’t Want to Miss a Thing,” “Dream On” is a classic arena ballad which comes to life in a special way in the setting of a large hall (or mini-arena, in the Bowl’s case). “Dream On” is an operatic, almost Queen-ly pop-rock opus-ette, with many working parts and a climactic vocal high part — which Mr. Tyler had no problem hitting.

The show’s closer, “Sweet Emo-

tion,” is another of the band’s cleverly structured, multi-part songs, from its bass riff-driven introduction (given extra solo space for bassist Tom Hamilton) through the simmering verses and power-rocking guitar riffs to come. We knew something pre-planned was in the works when stage smoke emanated from a speaker cabinet as the guitarist caressed the speaker with his ax, presaging bursts of stage smoke plumes and confetti cannonade at the end of the song/show.

Mr. Tyler seemed elated by the evening, calling this “the best show of the tour.” True or not, Aerosmith at the Bowl amounted to one of the greatest rock shows in memory in this town. Like another still-kicking band from England, Aerosmith knows it’s only rock ‘n’ roll, but they seem to like it, as much as or more than ever. And they still nail it onstage.

