

Earth Day-the concert: rock n' roll to save the environment

By Eddie Morales
Special to the Observer

A small little town tucked quietly in the center of Maryland became the main capital of the world for one very short but important day.

Columbia's Meriwether Post Pavilion has seen some great concerts before, but none as outstanding as the show put on by a handful of aware musicians Saturday afternoon. Earth Day 1990-the concert was everything it was built up to be and more. It was eclectic. It was dynamic. It was awesome.

The musical ensemble played all kinds of music, from reggae to hip hop to folk to simple rock n' roll. Special guests came to support the just cause of saving the environment, and as performer after performer came on, an audience of 15,000 was whisked into believing they may have seen one of the best concerts ever.

The show got off to a slow start, as the energetic band Graffitiham took the stage to warm up the few fans who showed up early. Their early forgettable performance was quickly replaced by Milwaukee's Shocker, a powerful singer who unfortunately was granted only 25 minutes of playing time.

But Shocker made the most of it. With acoustic guitar in hand, she blasted through two songs from her 1988 release "Sharp Shelled Shocker," including the song "Don't mess around with my little sister," which discusses the problems of Central America.

"I think we'd all be better off if we bought a guitar, learned three simple chords and stopped buying so many demo records," Shocker mused to the audience.

Shocker was followed by the over-the-top political teachings of Englishman Billy Bragg, a performer known for erasing the rules of concert etiquette, including an acappella performance of "International," a early 19th century war song, while in the process preaching the rules of capitalism.

"Stop buying and buying and buying," he said.

Africa Bambaata's Jungle Brothers came up next, playing a rather short and listless set. Bambaata's rap is nothing special, and the bass tones did little to incite the audience to dance.

Baltimore based Crack the Sky, a living rip-off of pre-1980 Pink Floyd if there ever was one, came up next and played a tight 30 minute set. Lead singer John Polombo, decked in Blues Brothers gear, sounded good in the broad pavilion arena, and may

have even grabbed some new fans in the process.

But everything came full circle when the Indigo Girls, with REM lead singer Michael Stipe in tow, came out to play a rousing 25 minute set. Emily Saliers and Amy Ray flawlessly poured through songs from their 1989 self-titled album, while Stipe ambled gracefully through the background vocals.

Then, after having sung "Vice you on Fire" and "All Along in the Shape of a Heart," Saliers and Ray let Stipe take centerstage to sing "Haircut," a spiritual yet individualistic song off REM's "Green" album.

The folkish sound was replaced 10 minutes later by the absolute funkadelic/reggaeish pounding of KRS One and his posse Boogie Down Productions. Boogie Down hit every dance nerve cohort: the Jungle Brothers were unable to find, and not five minutes later their performance had amassed a shaking motion in the audience.

Boogie pop and rock 'n' roll artists Robby and cock 'n' roll artists Robby Thunderbirds and Bruce Hornsby and the Range grabbed the next two slots. The Thunderbirds pumped through their hit "Tough Enough" and "Wrap It Up," but got their best response from a early 1990s hit tune.

Hornsby is a great stage performer who won over a skeptical crowd. The lanky piano player rolled melodiously through "Mandolin Rain," "The Way It Is," and the environmentally aware "Through the Looking Glass," never missing a beat.

Bragg came back after Hornsby to play a 10 minute set that lasted a little longer when REM guitarist Peter Dinklage and 10,000 Mandolin lead singer Natalie Merchant came on to run through some REM tunes.

Bragg played "Shirley" and "Waiting for the Great Leap Forwards," and then played background guitar for Stipe's singing of "Disturbance at the Heron House," and "Fall on Me," in what was perhaps the highlight in an already highlighted concert.

The Mantas followed close behind, firing the crowd into a generated frenzy. Merchant pranced and swooned all around the stage, while her sharp playmates keyed perfectly to her adorably melodic voice. "Like the Weather," and "What's the Matter Here," via from the Mantas' 1988 smash "In My Tribe," stood out in the flawless 50 minute performance. It couldn't get any better.

But then the son of a musical pro-

policy turned the event into his own showcase. Ziggy Marley, showing the face of youth and littering the air with

outward political songs and joy, was amazing.

Marley began his set with "Tumbin' Down," released, and followed with "We Propose," a highly political song that works only with the domestic bass movement. Marley has mastered on his album.

And then Marley touched the heaven by singing one of his father's songs. In an almost frighteningly and family voice and stance, Marley and family sang "Could you be Loved," with all the conviction of their late father. Outstanding.

Ziggy plays to an audience with adept control. He dances, he prances and he absolutely enthralled, from his petriotic accent to his long dreads. He ran through "Yesterday's People," "Look Who's Dancin'," and "Justice," and most important, "Get Up, Stand Up," a proclamation of human rights his father wrote as a contribution to mankind.

After singing it once, he was joined minutes later by the whole crew to sing it one last time.

Earth Day-the concert could have made mountains move. It incited a generation, it was a call to action. But it was the performers that made it the most memorable concert of all time.

The outspoken musicians and their worldly cause

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The rain clouds came and went, the wet, soggy afternoon mud turned cold and hard by nightfall, and as performer after performer came on stage to pledge their allegiance to the planet they have no intention of losing, it was the Earth that played centerstage.

Earth Day 1990 couldn't have been more perfect. "This is not just an event, it's an inflection point of history that puts an end to a decade of greed, hypocrisy and audacity and moves into a green decade," said Dennis Hayes, member of Concerts for the Environment. "We can no longer continue to do what has been done in the last decade. We demand a change. We desperately need one."

Meriwether Post Pavilion played host to the concert of the 90s Saturday afternoon. From the folkish mingling of the Indigo Girls to the hip hop reggae sounds of KRS One and Ziggy Marley, the concert bridged all forms of music to unite in one common cause—to save the environment.

While on stage it was indeed the music that was the forefront, backstage it was the issues at hand that was foremost on the performers' mind.

"We are not here for the music as much as we are here to show the world how important the Earth is as our mother—our original mother—and that we must take care of it," the energetic Marley said. "I'm not going to make today Earth Day, every day should be Earth Day. Keep the message alive that people should take care of their manna just like you take care of your manna."

The performer stressed that it was a lack of education

more than anything else that has caused the environment to be in such dire straits.

"I think it's a sad state of affairs when the environmental political leaders whose job it is to help protect our world," said Michael Stipe, lead singer of REM. "Our political leaders are not answering quick enough. It's up to the individual to make a difference. I firmly believe that. Education is the key, and we know how bad it is in this country," Stipe added. "There are so many simple things the individual can do to change the world. But it is ignorance that is out there."

Billy Bragg went beyond the government to blame the large multinational businesses for the world's severe environmental problems. Pointing out that it is the multinationals that own the government more than yes-terday, change begins with boycotts and attacks on big business.

All of the big corporations are geared to making us buy more and more things, consume more things and make things to look more like artifacts than anything else," Bragg said. "If we are going to save the world, we have to control our own consumerism, and stop from wanting and wanting and wanting."

"This is a cause that obviously anyone with sense is going to support," said singer/songwriter Robyn Hitchcock. "It's not really a cause. It's more fundamental than that. I mean, you're not going to get a lobby of environmentalists saying 'Look here, we on behalf of Earth on would like to put an opposing view—there are far too many selfish clatter on the horizon with their biased feathers.'"

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