

Steve Vai with Eric Sardinas: *the Pageant, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005*

I actually feel genuine regret for any one who was not at the Steve Vai show on Sunday night. It was an event of epic proportions that a person could wait years for in St. Louis. For one reason alone I make this claim:

It was a true privilege to witness Steve Vai and Tony MacAlpine and Billy Sheehan on the same stage trading solos. (I've been waiting to see MacAlpine come to town since the early to mid-eighties when he released *Edge of Insanity* and *Maximum Security*!) Besides his already renown neo-classical guitar shredding, MacAlpine is one of the most amazing keyboard players on the scene right now. He plays in a style with the finesse of Chopin but with lightning speed. Billy Sheehan played a solo where he was playing non-stop 32<sup>nd</sup> note arpeggios on the bass in long phrases that made my arm hurt just watching. There was another guitar player, and I apologize for not knowing his name, but he looked to me like a younger kid who was dressed kind of preppy. It seemed that his main purpose was to keep guys like me from coming up to Vai and saying, "Dude let me play rhythm guitar in your band!" This way he can just say, "No thanks, I already have this kid here." (Who by the way is absolutely incredible on the guitar and can play just like Vai.) The problem is that the realism of his plain manner of dress seemed to detract just a bit from the presentation of mystery and higher enlightenment portrayed by the rest of the stage show. The drummer has a bit of the punk look, but is one mind-blowing percussionist. He has an unending supply of energy and is extremely tight, right there keeping up with Vai.

The level of musicianship of all of the band members is beyond reproach and they all had plenty of room to stretch out and lay down some chops. But you know, it was not even their technical abilities that struck me. It was how much they were able to express.

That definitely includes the opening act Eric Sardinas. He is this amazing Texas blues guitar player with a real Hendrix flair. Some at first might have thought that it is an odd pairing with Vai, but it soon becomes apparent that the common thread is that Sardinas is also able to tap into the Spirit of the Muse. He plays slide on a dobro (which is an all metal delta blues style acoustic guitar) and uses the feedback to create these incredible sounds much like Page playing the part of the wizard in *The Song Remains the Same*. Even lighting his guitar on fire at one point – I know, I know, that's been done, but the killer thing about it was that since the dobro is all metal, he put the fire out and kept on jamming on it!

The visual aspect is also a very important part of experiencing Vai's playing. It's the way that he moves and expresses the sounds with his whole body. During the tune "Midway Creatures" from his new disc, Vai comes out with laser lights on his fingers and his head amid plumes of red-lit smoke like some kind of futuristic cyborg playing impossible sounds. By the end of the song, he seems like a primitive man performing a pagan ritual dancing around a ceremonial fire, all the while he is controlling the feedback of his guitar that is lying open on the stage. But that's the beauty of it, he can juxtapose cultures and references simultaneously; the future and the past, celtic and middle-eastern, blues and the orient, the controlled and the chaotic. I'd venture to say that he achieves a truer and more human expression of music with the human form that many attempts of 'legitimate' dance theaters and other such culture vultures to be found off Broadway.

If you were not able to make the show, then definitely pick up the DVD *Live at the Astoria* – you'll see what I mean.

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