



HAIL RUFUS

Rufus Wainwright blew away the Perth Concert Hall crowd with his larger-than-life talent.

By JAY HANNA

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT.
What a way to kick off Perth International Arts Festival's music program.

The prodigiously talented singer, songwriter, composer and showman was nothing short of a revelation, dazzling a packed Concert Hall crowd with a sensational concert that combined cabaret, opera, rock and folk to create a musical tour de force.

Wainwright's seven-piece band may have looked a motley crew in their mismatched candy striped suits, but musically they were perfectly in sync.

Led by Wainwright's musical director Gerry Leonard, the brass section regularly swapped their instruments and occasionally all seven punctuated songs with spine-tingling backing vocals.

The theatrical feel of the show was heightened by fabulous dramatic light effects. For show opener *Release the Stars* the lights scattered constellations into the crowd and we knew we were in for something quite magical.

Backed by a black and white Ameri-

can flag, Rufus sang of being "so tired of you America" on *Going to a Town*. Once the song ended Wainwright explained that his remodelled flag with its black and white stripes and glamorous sparkling brooches for stars represented "both sides of the states".

"The black and white stripes are everything that is horrifying and disgusting" and the brooches "everything that is wonderful" about the US.

His spiels, be they political or personal anecdotes, were as wildly entertaining as his music. He spoke of taking his first swim in the Indian Ocean at Swanbourne Beach where he was "assaulted by male voluptuousness".

Compared to the Adonis-like Australians, Wainwright said he and his band were like "geckos": "We were like white, albino, lizard type things."

The first set wrapped up with a trip to New York for *The Art Teacher*, Berlin for the *Tiergarten* and ended in France with *Leaving for Paris*. Then local Kenny Ang, who took up Wainwright's internet challenge to perform the talking part on *Between My Legs*, almost stole the show for his menacing spoken delivery.

For the second half, Wainwright

returned in the lederhosen he wore in the sleeve images for *Release the Stars*. *The Consort* was followed by a bold and beautiful *Do I Disappoint You* with its swirling flutes and crashing cymbals. The unleashed ferocity and creativity had the audience agape.

While Wainwright's infamous turn as Judy Garland was touched upon earlier in the night with *A Foggy Day* and *If Love Were All* it was not until the encore that Wainwright morphed into the diva.

Taking to the piano in a white terry-towelling bathrobe he performed *Poses*. Then he sat centre stage and added some bling and red lippy. The robe was dropped and Wainwright was now garbed in a tuxedo jacket long enough to protect his modesty and short enough to show off his sensational pins.

Next his band came leaping on stage like Michael Flatley on a bad day. They flailed around in a hilarious attempt to channel old Hollywood musical dancers.

Wainwright was all glam and poise as he stalked the stage in towering heels singing *Get Happy*. Exuberant, extravagant and glorious, it was the highlight of a truly mind-blowing concert. It doesn't get much better than that.