



KILLER QUEEN

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT
Perth Concert Hall
Saturday, February 9, 2008

What better way to kick off this year's *Perth International Arts Festival* music program, than with a jaw-dropping performance from one of the classiest, most flamboyant and entertaining performers in modern music. **Rufus Wainwright** has garnered a reputation worldwide for his merging of classical, operatic, cabaret and pop styles and delivering this potent-mixture live with his powerful, classically-trained voice. The sold-out Concert Hall audience on Saturday reflected Wainwright's universal appeal. Sitting between horn-rimmed glasses wearing festival subscribers were scruffy indie kids and Vivaldi-loving grandparents alike.

Wainwright and his seven-piece band stepped onto stage looking more like the cast of *Joseph And The Technicolour Dream Coat* than a band. As the flutes, French-horns, trumpets, drums and guitars whizzed into the title track of his newest album, *Release The Stars*, Wainwright blew kisses to the crowd and assumed his crooning position at the microphone stand.

Going To A Town, Wainwright's bitter break-up letter to his birth-country (*'I'm So Tired of You America'*) was followed by an explanation of the dramatic American flag backdrop which hung behind the band. Black and white stripes represented all that is disgusting and horrible about the country and shiny, star-like brooches for all that is wonderful, Wainwright explained. Stumbling at the end of his political explanation,

Wainwright's hilarious comment "I don't know, just buy my records!" reflected the honesty and warmth that had the audience in the palm of his hand every time he begun a camp song introduction.

Sanssouci, Rules and Regulations, The Art Teacher and *Tiergarten* were all tastefully bundled together to form a soft, reflective and candid part of the evening. Switching between piano and guitar, Wainwright saved the razzle-dazzle for the end of the evening, preferring to brood these creations into cinematic soundscapes with the help of his multi-instrumentalist band. Following on from these heartfelt diary-entries, a brash and naughty *Between My Legs* sexed things up and gave those unprepared for Wainwright's sexual frankness something to talk about in the intermission.

Returning to the stage in the lederhosen (which he wore in the liner notes to *Release The Stars*) Wainwright's relatively-small band did well to recreate the orchestral grandeur of *Do I Disappoint You*. Perth audiences were also treated to a taste of his critically acclaimed Judy Garland concerts with bombastic versions of *Foggy Day (In London Town)* and *If Love Were All*.

One of the most entertaining aspects of the evening, was how effortlessly Wainwright guided the concert into clearly defined sections and atmospheres (not to mention his multiple costume changes). After a fitting and respectful all-acoustic tribute to Heath Ledger, Wainwright donned the heels and lipstick for a tongue-in-cheek, all-dancing Broadway finish to the show with *Get Happy*.

With hits *Gay Messiah* and *Poses* rounding off a polished, world-class and faultless performance - Wainwright received a long standing ovation from a crowd spellbound by his charisma, talent and class.

It's not surprising Elton John is championing Rufus Wainwright as the successor to his throne. God save the Queen.

DAVID CRADDOCK