



Versatile showman a one-off wonder

CONCERT

Rufus Wainwright
Perth Concert Hall
Review: Helen Crompton

It's hard to imagine anyone matching the polish and original virtuosity of Rufus Wainwright in concert.

On Saturday night, Wainwright and his seven-piece band, including an impressive brass section, walked on stage to woo and astonish the predictably packed Concert Hall audience.

Interestingly, the backdrop was a giant stars and stripes, but this American flag was a black-and-white version of the stripes (to represent all the horror and the bad things about America, he later told the audience) while the stars were remodelled as different crystal-like flakes (to represent all the good aspects).

And here, perhaps, was a parallel representation of just two elements of this artist: the vision that is able to see something the same but different and the gentle political aspect that is now apparent in his music (it's amazing how non-nationalistic a flag can be when you change its colours.)

Dressed in a white suit with signature glitter badges, using a type of snatch and grab costume-throughout-the-ages style, Wainwright took fans on a trip through numbers influenced by opera, chamber music and vaudevillian show tunes, with even a tiny bit of folk influence thrown in.

Early numbers in the show were from his latest, self-produced Release The Stars album, which came out last year. It was a big, showy, round sound with Wainwright going from vocals to piano and guitar with effortless style and loose ease. Rules and Regulations, Tiergarten and Sanosucia were delivered with equal powerfully charged emotion, as was his beautiful ballad Leaving for Paris, which was written for Baz Luhrmann's movie Moulin Rouge but surprisingly

rejected.

And here's another thing to remember and cherish about Wainwright: no matter how much glitter he wears on his suits, no matter how many disco balls are suddenly set spinning, no matter how much camp and cheese are thrown into the equation, the 34-year-old Canadian American never comes off as anything but deeply genuine.

This was the last Australian concert for Wainwright before he finishes the tour in Los Angeles and New York — it's a Valentine's Day finale. Having toured in North America, Europe, Asia and the Eastern States before he performed in front of stalwart fans in Perth, the man admitted suffering from jet lag and even stopped suddenly in the middle of the second number of the evening to take it from the top.

It didn't detract from the night. In fact, it was a reminder of the performer's generosity in what he gives on stage and how obviously displeased he is with second best.

Knowing a high percentage of the Concert Hall crowd was waiting for the re-emergence of Judy Garland ("I'll probably be doing bits of Judy for the rest of my life") at some point in the evening, the final number was an absolute blast. Wainwright slipped out of a white towelling robe (as if he had rushed from the dressing room to perform the encore that the crowd was holding out for) into lipstick and stilettos for Get Happy with the band in tuxedos running about the stage in an approximation of an old-time Hollywood musical.

It was sublime and left you wondering if there is anything musically or performance wise the guy can't do. A quick hand clap here for the band: they exchanged and interplayed vocals and instruments with an athletic precision that ensured a top quality night.

This was Rufus Wainwright's first visit to Perth. You've got to hope he comes back soon.



Full of emotion: Rufus Wainwright