

A few words on Nick Cave

Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds at the Mann Center on Friday night. (Dan DeLuca)

Dan DeLuca, *Inquirer Music Critic*
Posted: Sunday, July 27, 2014, 12:35 PM

The Inquirer

I didn't bring a notebook with me when I went to see Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds at the Mann Center in Fairmount Park on Friday, since I had written up the band at the Keswick Theatre on an earlier stop on their current tour for *Push The Sky Away* back in the spring of 2013.



So this wouldn't qualify as an official review. (If it was, I would have made sure to get there in time to see Kurt Vile & the Violators, who I wish I hadn't missed, but I had to have dinner with my mother before heading over to the Mann. Sorry Kurt, Jane DeLuca comes first.)

But back to Nick Cave. Way back in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Australian punk-goth songwriter Cave was in the early stages of what has become a legendary career, I was a Nick Cave skeptic.

Sure, I was attuned to the sheer force of the music he made with The Birthday Party and The Bad Seeds, with its combustive mixture of gospel, blues, and early rock and roll influences, and the way his sound was shot through with intermingling gangsta-outlaw and Biblical imagery. But it all seemed a too humorless and heavy handed to me, too willfully bloody and macho, as if Cave was always trying to show off his abiding enthusiasm for the Louvin Brothers by killing off another woman in song and dragging her body through the woods.

Decades later, Cave is a different kind of animal. And animal is the operative word, because on stage, Cave and the band (featuring feral violinist Warren Ellis) play with primal, animalistic fervor, delivering songs of brooding, measured grace that burst out in sustained sections of explosive rage. They're not fooling around up there.

But Cave, at 54, is much more playful with his persona than he once was. (Or who knows, maybe I missed the self awareness the first time around.) What's incontestable is that he's a remarkable front man, working the stage like a demon as footlights cast his giant shadow on the

walls of the Mann, and as he put the world's longest microphone cord to good use as he spent about 1/4 of the band's galvanic set (which lost a little steam during an encore in which he took requests) moving about in the crowd, a good 10 rows in, while he encouraged reserved seat holders to move down and fill up the aisles around him.

Cave is that rare punk era songwriter who not only pretty much looks the same - like a rail thin giant insect in stylish tapered suit, hair still dyed jet black the way he started doing it, just like Elvis did, at a very young age - but also has continued to work at an extremely high level. A higher level, I would argue. His recent records, both with the Bad Seeds and their even fiercer off-shoot band, Grinderman, are as good, if not better than the music he made in his 20s. And while it's true that his delivery is flamboyantly over-the-top when he diabolically bellows out "I ain't down here for your love / I ain't down here for your money / I'm down here for your SOUL!," he sings it like he means it, man.

I also love the way he reaches back not only to the early days of punk, but even further to the building blocks of rock and roll mythology. He did that on Friday with the Presley-inspired "Tupelo," and his epically profane (and in this theatrical performance, quite funny) version of "Stagger Lee." My personal favorite is "Higgs Boson Blues," the majestic 9 minute song from *Push* in which Cave cleverly plays with the Robert Johnson sold-his-to-the-Devil myth by relocating the crossroads to down Switzerland way where super-colliding physicists have isolated the "God particle" and Miley Cyrus floats by in the singer's subconscious. It's brilliant stuff.

One more thing, about the Nick Cave tribe. Because he reaches almost all the way back to the dawn of the punk era, and has remained relevant through the years, Cave has a multi-generational crowd following him, people who last saw him decades back and are excited to check back in, and fans half his age locked in to his new work, each group equally happy to be blown away by a magnetic singer and his powerhouse band on a beautiful summer night. Great show.

Read more at <http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/inthemix/A-few-words-on-Nick-Cave.html#tWcMLD0gt4tkOv44.99>