

Public Enemy Still Delivering The Message

Written by Westside ID219

Monday, 18 October 2004 20:41 -

A presidential election just wouldn't be the same without the fiery rhetoric of legendary rappers Public Enemy stirring things up.

Along with the pioneering hard rock/funk band Living Colour, the veteran rap outfit put on a show Sunday night at Avalon that was equal parts music concert and insurrectionist assembly.

Living Colour hasn't made much of a dent on pop culture since its groundbreaking 1988 debut, ``Vivid,"" a heady mix of metal, funk and politics.

Since then, guitarist Vernon Reid has become something of a musical legend, but Living Colour has remained in the shadows.

The band's unique and rather inaccessible mash of genres and styles may be the reason why. Though the playing was of the highest order, the band's new tunes lacked melodies and hooks, getting lost in a gaudy shuffle of metal, funk and reggae. The quartet's politics remained firmly radical, but their effectiveness was lost in the dizzying sound collages.

Once a powerful vocalist, singer Corey Glover lacked the fire and intensity of his late-'80s heyday, but gamely bellowed through such hits as the social commentary of ``Funny Vibe'"' and the classic ``Cult of Personality.'"'

Reid's slashing guitar exploits proved to be the bright spot of the set.

Whereas Living Colour sounded timid and unsure, Public Enemy simply gushed confidence and command.

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Backed by a DJ, a live rhythm section (guitar, bass, drums) and a three-man "security force"/dance troupe known as the S1Ws, Chuck D burst onstage and launched into the thunderous bounce of "She Watched Channel Zero," and the aggressive noise of "Welcome To the Terrordome."

As strong as these opening tunes were, worried looks soon came over the entire audience. Where was Flavor Flav? Midway through "Bring the Noise," all fears were allayed as the clown prince of hip-hop strode out onto the stage wearing a white terry cloth bathrobe and an unkempt midsized afro.

Chuck D may have the most powerful voice in hip-hop history, but it's even more effective bouncing off the hyperactive foil of his sidekick Flavor Flav.

Never known to be subtle in their political leanings, the two tore into the metal/rap hybrid of "Son of a Bush" followed by a not-so-genial call-and-response exercise directed at the president and his staff.

They lightened the mood a bit with Flavor Flav's solo jaunt "911's a Joke," but the levity didn't last long. While the S1Ws performed a choreographic mix of Black Panther muscle and James Brown shuffle, Chuck D erupted into the explosive dissonant jam of "Rebel Without a Cause," followed by the militant, dense funk of "Fight the Power." The crowd, already having lost its mind back in the early part of the set, broke out into spastic fits of radical fervor.

Public Enemy may no longer be among the mainstream hip-hop elite, but its message and delivery hasn't aged one bit.

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