

Philly Lead in Hip-Hop and Rap For Live 8

Written by Robert ID1620

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Hip-Hop and rap artists Kanye West, Jay-Z, the Black-Eyed Peas and host Will Smith led the U.S. edition of the Live 8 concert series from Philadelphia.

After British rockers the Kaiser Chiefs kicked things off with their hit "I Predict a Riot," hometown boy hip-hop rapper and actor Smith took the stage to begin hosting duties.

"Right now you're watching the biggest concert event in the history of the world," Smith said. Pleading for leaders of the G-8 summit to "end this daily tragedy" of African poverty, Smith was beamed around the world by satellite as he led the global audience in snapping their fingers every three seconds, signifying the child death rate in Africa.

"Today, we are here to declare our interdependence," said Smith in the city where the Declaration of Independence was signed. "Today we hold this truth to be self-evident: We are all in this together."

Later, the rapper-turned-movie star returned for the most theatrical performance of the day. He was carried onto the stage on a throne, with women spreading rose petals in his path. The theme from "Rocky" played just yards from the steps that Sylvester Stallone famously climbed in "Rocky."

That segued into a repeated sample of "the champ is here!" line that Smith delivered in the movie "Ali." Smith then introduced his old sidekick, DJ Jazzy Jeff, and they performed "Gettin' Jiggy Wit It" before launching down memory lane with the theme from Smith's early '90s sitcom, "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," and his classic hit "Summertime."

Smith's star power was only matched by Stevie Wonder, who closed the show by effectively turning Smith's finger snaps into handclaps. Backed by a dapper 11-piece band, Wonder proved he wasn't too old for a good funk groove on "Higher Ground" and "What the Fuss" — which had the blind singer strutting out in front of his keyboards.

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The final tune of the night was Wonder's classic "Superstition." One concertgoer, Paula Abdul, couldn't resist the beat, dancing enthusiastically on the side of the stage and, by extension, on the jumbo screens.

"The meaning of being an artist is to really do these kinds of things," Wonder said backstage. "We cannot stop now. The only way we can end this is to give more love."

Earlier, Kanye West performed "Jesus Walks" in front of an all-female string section outfitted in black skirts and dark stripe-like masks over their eyes. He delivered some of the harshest words of the day, lamenting "politicians who drive home in their Bentleys every night and watch thousands of Africans die."

Backstage, he told The Associated Press, "I'm not into politics, I'm into people. I know that these people are dying. My people. This is an event that will go down in history."

After Linkin Park started their set, Jay-Z came out for a mash-up with the rock-rap group. Jigga had the crowd chanting "Hova," his smooth cool in sharp contrast to Linkin Park's vein-popping fervor. The combination made for one of the days most popular performances, especially on Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'."

One of the first acts, the Black-Eyed Peas, took the stage with their usual energy and frenetic weaving, performing "Let's Get it Started." The rap group also pulled out a Bob Marley classic as they sang with obvious symbolism, "Get up, stand up, don't give up the fight."

Of course, there was much more than hip-hop.

Dave Matthews, who hails from South Africa, began his performance by thanking organizer Bob Geldof "for throwing a party to make a better world."

As to whether Live 8 would have any effect on the G-8 leaders, Matthews said backstage, "I

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think they're aware of what's going on, and judging from President's Bush's speech, he's moving in the right direction. We want him ... to move a little bit further," he said.

Introducing it as especially appropriate, Maroon 5 played a version of "Keep on Rockin" in the Free World" by Neil Young, who was to conclude the Canada concert.

Country singer Keith Urban also played the cover card, performing Phil Collins' "Another Day in Paradise," while the not-exactly-current Def Leppard were sure to play their old favorite, "Pour Some Sugar on Me."

The day's acts were punctuated by celebrities (including Natalie Portman, Jennifer Connelly and Richard Gere) who further reminded the audience of the cause with statistics and ways to petition.

"Today's gathering is not about charity, it's about humanity," said "Rush Hour" actor Chris Tucker.

Also in attendance were celebrities ranging from the Rev. Al Sharpton to Anna Nicole Smith, plus performers Alicia Keys, Destiny's Child, Toby Keith, Sarah McLachlan, Jars of Clay and Rob Thomas.

Fans stormed down the parkway just before 6 a.m. and pressed as far forward as possible, but only those closest to the front were able to see the stage. The less fortunate were treated to giant screen broadcasts of the concert, along with clips from the other cities.

Organizers and performers said as many as one million fans were there, but that was impossible to verify and seemed overblown, with several hundred thousand seeming more accurate. Police declined to provide an estimate.

Bon Jovi performed "Living on a Prayer" after being introduced by actor Don Cheadle as hailing

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from "the most exotic of locales" — New Jersey.

"An amazing event," Cheadle said backstage. "Hopefully it will light a fuse that will continue to go for years and years."

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Associated Press Writer Deborah Yao contributed to this report.