

Johnny Clegg leaves them dancing in the aisles (*Country Standard Time*)

By JEFFREY B. REMZ JUNE 27, 2012

Opening night can be a very tricky proposition for both fan and artist. After all, the kinks doubtlessly are going to be present, especially considering that the artist - in this case Johnny Clegg of South Africa - may have been off the road a bit.

Clegg's opening night of his North American tour was not exactly perfect, but that was only one small aspect of the nearly two-hour gig considering the quality of the songs and performers in habiting the stage. So much so, that after awhile the packed house was literally dancing in the aisles.

Clegg has been around a long time, first making his mark with the great, groundbreaking South African multi-racial band Juluka and then its successor Savuka before putting his name out front.

The problems on the first night were not major either - occasional conversations between Clegg and lead guitarist Andy Innes, who have been together for 19 years, before launching into the next song. That was about as "bad" as it got along with one guitar malfunction.

Fortunately, Clegg and band infused the songs, covering various parts of Clegg's career, with a lot of life. Clegg, at 59, has not lost anything in his vocal delivery. The sound tended to rely on an Afropop bent with quick guitar lines and a fast pace to the songs.

Clegg released his last state-side disc, "Human," in October 2010, so it's been awhile since he even released new music. And he only played three songs from the very good music - Love in the Time of Gaza, Give Me the Wonder and Nyembezi (Tears). Too bad he gave "Human" short shrift.

Clegg provided a professorial feel to the night, which should not come as a surprise because he was lectured in social anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg for four years before giving it up to forge a musical career. While sometimes a tad too lengthy, Clegg did an excellent job in giving depth to the songs through the background information, expounding on everything from South African gold mines to the women's right to vote around the world (New Zealand was the first country to do so, according to Clegg).

Not everything was merely for educational purposes. In introducing one of the evening's highlights, Bullets for Bafazane, Clegg said the song was about his tour manager with Juluka, who also happened to be involved in possible assassinations in South Africa with another group opposed to his. Clegg humorously went on to say how the idea of having an assassin with the band did not sit well with the group, with Bafazane told he had to choose between the two.

Clegg has varied little in one area over the decades, and it's all to the good - he has a lot of vigor and is quite the dancer. He often mixed it up, dancing in lockstep with backing singer Mandisa Dlanga, adding a lot of energy to the proceedings.

The other band members meshed well with Clegg as well. Innes often added taut, steely guitar lines that have been part and parcel of the sounds of Clegg's various musical projects. Dan Shout also was standout on keyboards, but particularly his sax playing, which provided an added kick to the songs.

Then again, it's hard to fault Clegg for puling out songs from varying parts of his three-decade long career. There's a lot there, and Clegg and band make it sound fresh.

Source: <http://www.countrystandardtime.com/d/stconcertreview.asp?xid=680>