

# Matchbox Twenty rocks Halifax, cheers up city in wake of "Juan"

by Steve Brun

Recently I had the opportunity – perhaps one of a lifetime – to see one of my favorite bands in concert.

When I heard that Matchbox Twenty would be performing in Halifax at the Metro Centre I knew I had to go no matter what the price. I called the box office a few days after tickets went on sale and discovered that only upper bowl seats remained at a cost of 61 dollars a pop. From this, I gathered two things: That Matchbox, while one of my favorite bands, also thought quite a bit of themselves, and also that Halifax was hungry for these rockers. So I swallowed my pride and opened my wallet for the seats.

Earlier that week Halifax had been nothing short of devastated by Hurricane "Juan," and it was obvious through the lack of accommodations available in the city that weekend. The army had been called in and was blocking off streets frustratingly, and power crews from New Brunswick and other parts of Nova Scotia were in town for as long as it took to clean up the fallen trees that were strewn unpredictably throughout the city. I had checked with the Metro Center, and the band's website several times during the week to ensure that the concert was still going forward, and inwardly hoping that they would at least refund our money if it did not.

Boston band The Push Stars opened the show, and were emphatic about how gen-

erous Matchbox Twenty had been to offer them the spot on their tour given that they didn't even have a record contract. The guys had been at it since 1995 so they were no strangers to live performance and put on a good show for the appreciative crowd. They played songs from their latest CD *Opening Time* like the catchy pop rock "Millionaire," and also showing their ability to rock out with songs like "waiting watching Wishing" and "Drunk Is Better Than Dead." No surprise that The Push Stars had previously been named the "Best Unsigned Band in America" according to R&R Magazine.

Then the real show started as Brian Yale, Paul Doucette, Adam Gaynor, Kyle Cook, and Rob Thomas hit the stage to the delight of the packed Metro Center crowd. The band kicked it into high gear with "Feel" off their new album *More Than You Think You Are*, and an older favorite "Real World" from their debut release *Yourself or Someone Like You*. Thomas then played to the crowd, and commented on the storm of that week: "You guys have had kind of a fucked up week," and "You're all only here because you heard we had electricity."

The audience roared with every hit song, and every time Thomas would address the frantic Nova Scotia faithful, and even though we were pretty far away from the stage it didn't matter to me. Everybody in the place was bopping and singing along, which is what you can do with Matchbox Twenty because

they have so many songs that we know. The crowd was a mix of young and old, and showed the diversity of MB20's repertoire and vast radio airplay.

A band that was voted Rolling Stone Magazine's "Best New Band" in their 1998 reader poll should and did put on a great stage show, highlighted by dazzling strobe lights and big screen video to go compliment each song. The band performed almost every song off *More Than You Think You Are* including the hits "Unwell" and "Disease." They played for almost two straight hours, and teased the fans slightly before coming out for a five song encore including their first chart-topper "Push," and an acoustic performance of "If You're Gone" dedicated to Thomas's wife, as it was the couples wedding anniversary, and performed with only Thomas singing and Cook playing solo guitar. All the while the guys were drenched in sweat and stopping at nothing to entertain the Haligonians.

I left the Metro Center as buzzed as if I had been in the mid-Sixties and seen The Beatles perform, although that's probably making matchbox twenty into something bigger than they are. However, not many bands today can come close to the originality of MB20's music, and there are even fewer songwriters that can match Rob Thomas's writing style. For me, matchbox Twenty has been one of the few bands that I have listened to consistently over a long period of time, and followed their career

since its beginnings.

If you ever have a chance to see this band live, or any band you admire for that matter, don't hesitate to spend the money, or take the chances to get there, because we only live once, and you may never get that chance to see them again. I remember writing to Matchbox Twenty's fan club earlier in their career and pleading with them to come to the Maritimes some day, and explaining how terrific the fans are in this corner of the world. Some naïve part of me wonders whether that letter persuaded them to start this tour in Halifax, but if that were true I think they probably could have got me closer to the stage.



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