

REVIEW – Simple Minds at the Usher Hall



Simple Minds were the archetypal 80's band: their emphatic, stadium-sized, harmonic and synth-filled hits meant that their studio energy transcended and inflated into a live phenomenon. Their friendly rivals, U2, pipped them to the post in terms of more convincing live vigour and studio experimentation. Ultimately, U2 became the biggest band in the world, and Simple Minds died off amid some repetitiveness.

Tonight, at Edinburgh's Usher Hall, a venue Simple Minds have played several times in their lengthy career – in fact, it's the 37th anniversary of Jim Kerr and Charlie Burchill beginning their musical journey – it feels as if we're back to their youthful energy.

With no support act and a mountain of a back catalogue, Simple Minds were predicted to play a lengthy set. Actually the band played two sets, with a 10-minute intermission splitting them. Their first set was geared towards the more casual Simple Minds fans, with the inclusion of two acoustic numbers and a solo piano performance by female backing singer, Catherine Davies. Their second set is shorter yet more alternative, with a change in backing vocalist and more modern material.

From the start, the Usher Hall was vibrant and spirited. Jim Kerr's Bono-esque stagecraft dominated the show, utilising the entire stage set-up while making sure his dedicated fans are right at home. It could not get any better for the paying customers, their first set ending with 'Waterfront' and 'Don't You (Forget About Me)' back-to-back, and fan favourites such as 'Glittering Prize' and 'New Gold Dream (81-82-83-84)' entertaining the top-end of the first set. As it concluded,

Jim Kerr mentioned that “most bands would be off now on their private jets and eating sushi, but we’ve got plenty more music to play.”

The second set didn’t gather just the same momentum as the first, with some lack of interest from a crowd that were previously eager, now appearing disenchanted. But all of that changed with the final two songs, ‘Big Music’ and ‘Sanctify Yourself’. The show went on for more than two hours and the 55-year-old band return to the stage for the second time to play a mixed encore, including a baffling rendition of ‘Riders on the Storm’ and a jubilant finale of ‘Alive and Kicking’.

“Glasgow gave us our break but Edinburgh made us,” Kerr stated mid-show, clearly in awe of the joyful Usher Hall crowd that was staring right at him. Even when the show ended 150 minutes later with the house lights rising, half the band want to stay on stage. Kerr, Burchill, and the long-time mighty drummer Mel Gaynor graced the stage, applauding the resounding audience, while dancing to Kingsmen’s ‘Louie Louie’ that blared over the PA.

But that last minute exemplifies one thing for Simple Minds: that they never know when this musical adventure is going to end. It could end tomorrow, or one of Scotland’s longest-running outfits could record and play live for another 10 years. The prolonged salutations showed that Simple Minds want to savour such moments.

As Jim Kerr said at the end of ‘Alive and Kicking’, “We’ll never forget this.”