

Fine Arts

Music With a Message: Human Rights Now!

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Fine Arts Writer

As the gates opened at JFK Stadium for the Human Rights Now concert, I sat in French class learning possessive adjectives. Anxious to see the show, I was relieved when 3:30 arrived and I could get going. My friends picked me up and we were on our way. As we approached the double-decker bridge going into Philadelphia, I began to get excited. Top notch acts, including Tracy Chapman, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, and Sting, were playing for a great cause, and I was going to be part of history.

My excitement halted in a moment's time as we approached a string of cars a mile long waiting to exit at Broad Street. I had underestimated the extent of the traffic. Nervousness set in as my boyfriend pointed out, "Can't you feel the bridge shake?"

We sat from 4:00 until nearly 6:00 as the tractor trailers passed us by, causing the bridge to sway. Opening acts Joan Baez and Yousou N'Dour had come and gone.

After coming off the exit, we were directed to Franklin D. Roosevelt Park for parking. Underneath the bridge, about a mile and a half from the stadium, we found a space. Finally, we were on our way.

As the guards ripped our tickets and we walked through the gates, Tracy Chapman's "Fast car" faded in the wind. Chapman finished her set with "Revolution" (her original version) and brought the crowd to their feet.

As Sting walked to center stage, a deafening roar erupted within the stadium. His own music with a message began with five words- "Free, Free, Set them free." The crowd began to realize what the show was really about.

Sting's set consisted of both old and new songs, including "Every Breath You Take." (during which Bruce Springsteen lent a line or two, though uncertain of the lyrics), "Fortress Around Your Heart," "Fragile," and "Grecco Solo (And We Dance).

This song, which was banned in Chile, refers to a dance families of prisoners of conscience perform as a vigil to their loved ones. As Peter Gabriel joined Sting in singing "Someday we'll dance and make waves. Someday we'll sing our freedom," the video screens in front showed footage of an earlier Amnesty show where the Chilean families joined Sting on stage. With this scene grabbing the audience by their hearts, petitions asking to free certain prisoners were signed immediately.

Judging by the crowd's reaction, a majority were awaiting the arrival of Peter Gabriel. "Games without Frontiers," "No Self Control," and the mega-hit "Sledgehammer" had the crowd dancing on their seats and screaming for more as Gabriel, though looking extremely exhausted, ran about the stage.

Any Peter Gabriel fan knows the two highlights of his show are "In Your Eyes" (background vocals provided by Senegalese band, Youssoou N'Dour) and the moving "Biko," which can be considered

Amnesty International's theme song. (Stephen Biko was a Black man who was arrested, tortured and eventually killed in a South African jail.) As Gabriel walked off the stage, he said, "The rest is always up to You," and turned the microphone to the audience. A feeling of unity spread throughout the stadium as the crowd uniformly punched their fists in the air to the time of the music.

I'm sorry to say that my intuition told me to leave before the show ended due to the ridiculous amount of traffic we encountered on the way up. As Bruce Springsteen sang the opening line to "Born in the U.S.A.," we made our way to our car. A lot of people can't understand why we left after only seeing two acts, considering we paid \$35.00 to see the show. I'll answer it like this.

As I watched the Chilean women's faces during Sting's "Grecco Solo" and raised my own fist with thousands of others for all prisoners of conscience, the artists themselves didn't seem to matter. The artists weren't the issue at hand. The issue now was Human Rights.

In 1948, every country in the world signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stated "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." As Amnesty International celebrates the 40th anniversary of the signing of the document with the Human Rights Now! Tour, they continue their fight to validate the promises made within the declaration.

Amnesty International is a

non-profit organization which has been working for over 25 years to end torture around the world, ensure prompt, fair trials, and to free prisoners of conscience, that is those who have been jailed because of their beliefs and/or race. Amnesty International is totally impartial in that they protect the rights of all human beings.

Through letter writing campaigns and the Urgent Action Network, which receives details of unjust government behavior within hours and immediately sends hundreds of telegrams and telex messages demanding humane treatment by the particular government, Amnesty International has been successful in freeing tens of thousands from imprisonment and stopping cruel and inhumane punishment.

But, like all organizations, in order to remain effective, funds are needed. Amnesty International asks as a guideline, \$25.00 per year membership fee, though as little as \$15.00 is accepted (primarily from students and low income families), and more is always welcome.

Membership includes being sent a letter writing kit and information about various prisoners of conscience around the world. It is the member's duty to write letters to the governments demanding these people be treated fairly and in a humane matter.

If you are interested in becoming a member of Amnesty International, write to: Amnesty International USA, 322 Eighth Avenue, New York, New York, 10001. Write a letter; save a life.

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