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THE WAILERS PROVE THEIR TIMELESS LEGACY WITH 'EXODUS' PERFORMANCE

"People want to listen to a message, word from Jah. This could be passed through me or anybody. I am not a leader... the word of the songs, not the person, is what attracts people." -- Bob Marley



NEW ORLEANS | The Rastafarian message was heard by all those who attended the House of Blues Saturday night for the much-anticipated Wailers show. The band is no stranger to the Crescent City, having played countless times in New Orleans.

Every time I see the Wailers, I feel the love and have reggae in my head for days after. Reggae is such a powerful genre of music with an entrancing quality. This style of music does it for me without fail and profoundly affects me when it is played live.

My excitement coupled with anxious anticipation set in on Thursday when I found out I would have a reggae-filled Saturday night, even more so when I heard the Wailers would be playing the entire Exodus album. Excuse me, but WHAT!!! I'm pretty sure every reggae fanatic around the world knows this album cover to cover, word for word. Even casual fans know parts of the classic work, even if they don't know how or why they remember it.

For a music lover such as myself, part of the genuine experience is feeling connected to the music because you've heard an album repeatedly and can sing along with every single tune. The Exodus album is one of my answers to the question "What three albums would you take to a deserted island."

I got to test that during my personal exodus from New Orleans on August 27, 2005. I didn't have a chance to grab much but what I did grab were my three favorite CD's: Etta James Greatest Hits, The Beatles' Hard Day's Night and Bob Marley and the Wailers' Exodus.

Exodus has been named on of the top albums of all time by Time Magazine. Released in 1977, the collection of reggae hits on this album touch us today as stongly as they did 32 yrs ago. The sprit and legacy of Bob Marley live on though his words, those poetic lyrics of peace of tolerance, peace and love.

The House Of Blues was jam-packed early at 9 p.m. I'm sure there were a couple of die-hard reggae fans just as eager to see opening band The Revelers as they were to see the Wailers. Our own local roots, rock and reggae group have their own following as evidenced by the fans that follow them to French Quarter fest, Jazz Fest and Cafe Negril. The band played a 45-minutes set to an eager and receptive crowd. The Revelers have opened for the Wailers in times past and they seemed very comfortable and familiar with the whole scenario. The set was a success as the band was able to warm up the audience and get the reggae juices flowing. "We love reggae, we love reggae music" I emphatically proclaimed in response to a Revelers chant of "Do you love reggae?"

After waiting around for what seemed like an eternity, the Wailers took the stage to strong applause and cheers of the audience. There was also an instant herbal aroma in the air as is customary at Wailers shows. The smell was right in sync with the downbeat of the first song. The band was made up of nine members, both old and new. The one member who hypnotized me was Elan Atias, the lead vocalist. His voice and presence emanated everything that represented Bob Marley. It was almost surreal. During a few key points, I closed my eyes and no one could have told me I wasn't listening to Marley himself.

Elan recently rejoined the Wailers after parting ways with them in 1999. He left the group to pursue a solo career but it seems the spirit of Marley called him back and praise Jah for that because no one does it better!

Elan is a Los Angeles native raised in a Jewish American family. At the age of 18 he met Wailers guitarist Al Anderson while recording a CD. At that same time, the Wailers were without a singer after Junior Marvin left the group. Elan was introduced to band leader Aston "FamilyMan" Barrett and shortly after was asked to step in as the voice of the Wailers. Atias has even been accused of lip synching because his voice is so similar to Marley's. He is often mistaken as one of the Marley sons. It's almost a religious experience to see someone channel so wholeheartedly the essence of Bob Marley.

The first song that stands out in mind from that night was "Exodus." This song was performed to a very upbeat tempo and was full of life as the two female vocalists' voices blended with Elan's. Midway through the song, the horns and keys alternated between solos. The audience went crazy as the entire band jumped up and down to the reggae beats. At one point, Elan yelled to the crowd "New Orleans, I say yeah keep it going, keep it going.

Exodus led directly into "Jamming" as the band urged the audience to clap along. "Jah, Jah children must unite/and we Jamming in the name of the name of the Lord." The lead singer's mood was palpable as he danced lively around the band. This song sounded amazing, especially during the guitar solo as the crowd clapped to the 1-2 beat.

"These next two songs are for the ladies," Elan announced. "Ladies, you out there?" The female uproar that these words produced was awesome! I knew on the second beat to the tune exactly what it was -- "I don't wanna wait in vain for your love," this being one of my favorite tracks of all time. I couldn't help bust out in song and dance.

"Waiting in Vain" is an epic reggae love song and tonite it was done perfectly. The second tune for the ladies was "Turn your lights down low." As I looked around I noticed couples dancing, bartenders singing out loudly and

the band playing flawlessly. I took the moment in, closed my eyes and sang along too. "Turn your lights down low, and pull your window curtain oh let the moon come shining in, into our life again."

The Wailers went on to perform other beloved hits such as "One Love/People Get Ready" (the last song on the Exodus album) and then straight into the second set with "No Woman No Cry," "Get Up, Stand Up," and "Stir it Up."

"New Orleans, you want some more?" Elan asked as he delivered the vocals to these tunes with no effort whatsoever. Surely Marley is smiling down from Rastafarian heaven.

"Redemption Song" was a very memorable performance, its lyrics holding the power to unite and display Marley's poetic genius. The line "Emancipate from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free your mind" signaled another moment in the performance when the rhythms of reggae unified everyone in the crowd as they all sang along with Elan.

Between songs the singer took the time to speak about a cause the Wailer are supporting. The band is helping out the United Nation's "I Went Hungry" program. Elan displayed a red bracelet and explained to the audience the real hunger problems in the world. The band contributed by donating all the money that would normally be used to feed the band backstage to the program. The Wailers have inspired other music groups to do the same in an effort to feed hungry children all over the world.

The show came to a close with Elan singing "Together as One" from his 2006 solo album, a truly touching reggae song full of human emotion and rasta beliefs. Overall the Wailers show was a terrific blend of the Exodus album, Marley classics and Elan's hits. The entire show was imbued with good vibes. I noticed folks of all ages and colors jamming out to the songs of a legendary man and an epic band.

"I love the development of our music, that's what I really dig about the whole thing -- how we've tried to develop, y'know? It grows. That's why everyday people come forward with new songs. Music goes on forever." -- Bob Marley