

LIFE & ARTS

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Waters goes to 'The Wall' for thrilled fans

By JEFF MIERS

NEWS POP MUSIC CRITIC

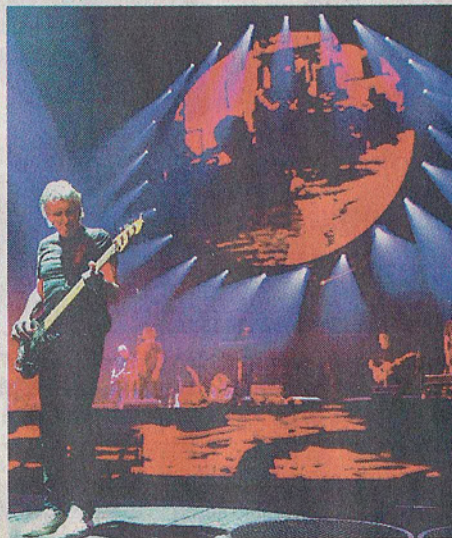
Modern pop wisdom suggests that a performer courts his audience, begs for that audience's approval, dances, shimmies and shakes, smiling all the while like a politician during a high-profile photo-op, or acting for all the world like a jilted sweetheart desperate for his lover's touch. Roger Waters isn't having any of that nonsense. He doesn't approach his audience on bended knee. He's not there to be a pop star. He expects only that you open your mind, heart, ears and eyes, and let the music and the story take you away.

Like an anti-pop prophet, Waters builds a wall between himself, his band and the audience, and

then tears it down at the show's conclusion in an act of violent, heartrending and exhilarating catharsis. The symbolism is tough to miss.

On Friday, a sold-out, packed-to-the-rafters HSBC Arena bore witness to the full performance of Waters' masterpiece, "The Wall." This was not a mere concert. It was an audiovisual play set to music. That music towers, like the wall itself, above its contemporaries as one of the greatest pieces of rock art to have emerged from the 20th century.

When Pink Floyd released "The Wall" in 1980, it represented the culmination of the ideas Waters had been wrestling with for a decade. It's principal themes include alienation, from society and self; the psychological torment of



Bill Wippert/Buffalo News

Roger Waters performs "The Wall" in HSBC Arena on Friday. Another photo on the Picture Page, A6.

CONCERT REVIEW

Roger Waters

Friday night in HSBC Arena.

schooling and its violently clumsy attempts at socializing children; the pure dread (and wretched political underpinnings) of war; the dark underbelly of sexuality, and thereby, the inner workings of guilt, betrayal and shame; the black heart of fascism; and the ingenious dog-and-pony show that is pop stardom. Not exactly a nice night out with your date to hear the hits.

As the lights went down, and a troop of jackbooted, generic fascist types arrived onstage waving

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Band's performance was beyond reproach

WATERS • from C1

flags, an air of titillated dread filled the Arena, one that came to an immediate climax as a massive explosion heralded the arrival of the band. "Do I have your attention now?" seemed to be the unspoken subtext. Waters appeared, dressed all in black, wielding his black Fender Precision Bass like a blunt instrument he fully intended to bludgeon someone with before night's end, that half sneer, half smile adorning his still-striking features.

"So you thought you might like to go to the show," he began.

Bit by bit, as the band performed — "The Thin Ice," then the thrilling gut-punch of "Another Brick In the Wall," "The Happiest Days of Our Lives," "Another Brick In the Wall Part II" and finally a resolution of sorts into the aching "Mother" — a massive wall was erected across the front of the stage. By intermission time, it would completely obscure the band from view, acting as an enormous video screen, playground for a variety of enormous inflatable puppets representing characters from the libretto — the cynical, abusive schoolmaster, the sneering, praying mantis-like wife, the smothering Mother — and metaphorical signifier of man's fear-based desire to create a world of "us" and "them."

The band Waters assembled to perform his magnum opus could not have been finer, unless the Floyd's David Gilmour was along for the ride. That's no dis on guitarists Snowy White, Dave Kilminster and G.E. Smith, who gracefully inhabited Gilmour's achingly melodic signature motifs, bringing their own personalities to bear on them, but sticking close enough to the script to serve the music's original intention. Waters' son Harry played keyboards along with veteran Jon Carin; Gra-

On the Web

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ham Broad thumped the tubs with dignity; newcomer Robbie Wyckoff handled the bits of the album that Gilmour had originally assumed lead vocal duties for; and the members of vocal group Venice (Jon Joyce, Mark Lennon, Michael Lennon and Kipp Lennon) handled backing vocals and harmonies. The sound, like the performance itself, was simply outstanding and beyond reproach throughout.

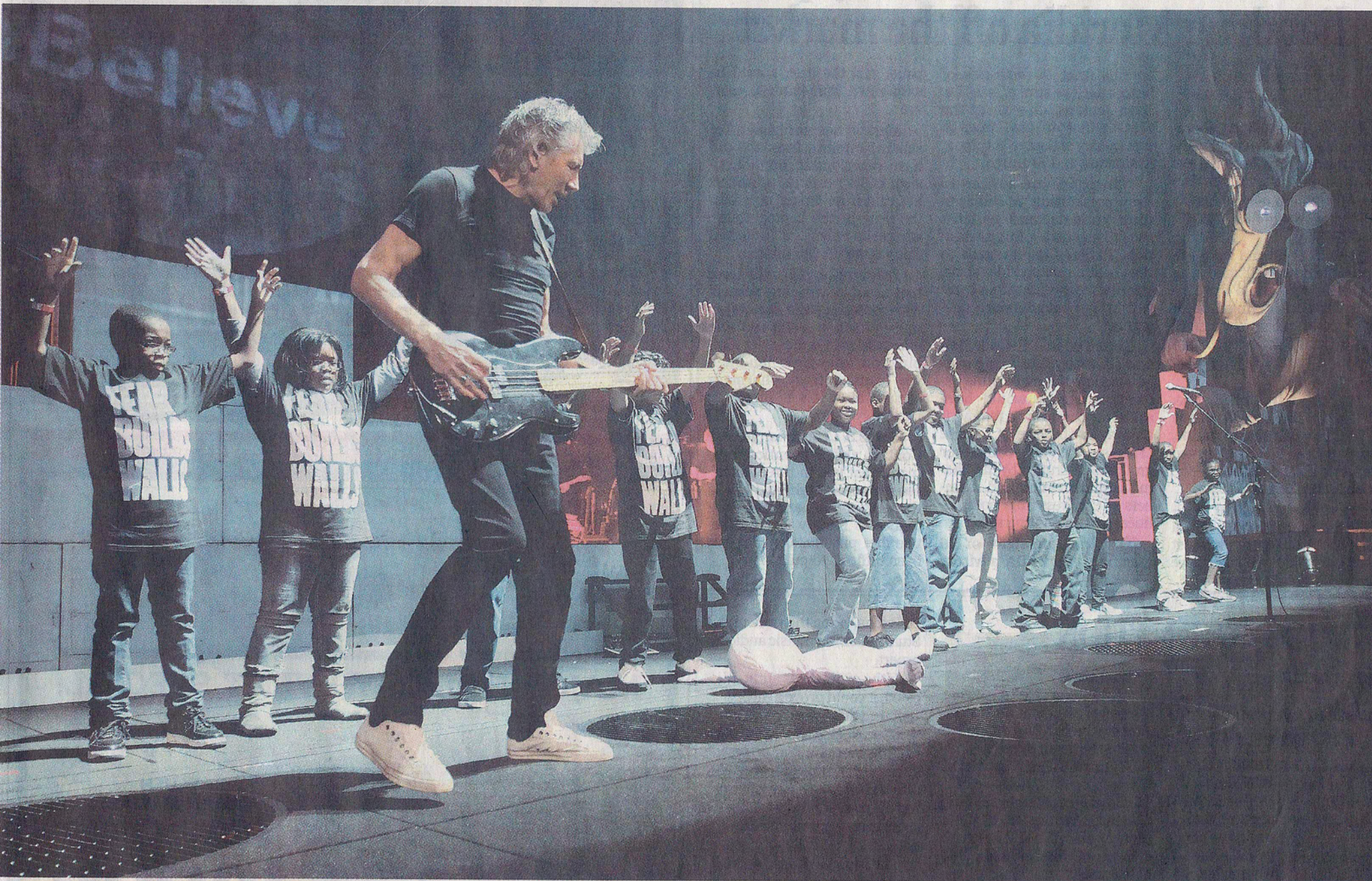
Waters acted as ringmaster, a conduit to the thwarted, battle-weary but still doggedly determined idealism that acts as cornerstone of "The Wall." A central thread throughout the piece leads back to the death of Waters' father, Eric Fletcher Waters, when the future Pink Floyd co-founder was still a baby. It is likely this pivotal event, coupled with the leftist leanings of the intellectually vibrant mother who raised him, that later solidified into Waters' moral outrage at what he sees as the senselessness of war.

During intermission, names and descriptions of lost loved ones submitted by fans via Waters' Web site — victims in any and all wars, as per the man's instructions — scrolled across the wall. The effect was chilling, the point — that lives are routinely wasted in the pursuit of wall-building between nations — impossible to miss.

Waters and the band performed "The Wall" in its entirety, and nothing else. The collapse of the wall at the show's emotional coda acted as encore. This seemed wholly appropriate. What was there left to say? Anything more would've felt superfluous.

e-mail: jmiers@buffnews.com

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Waters and friends: School children dance on stage as Roger Waters performs "The Wall" at HSBC Arena in Buffalo on Friday night.

Bill Wippert/Buffalo News