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Concert review



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Roger Waters, left, performs Wednesday night with students from St. Paul's Neighborhood House before a sold-out crowd of 15,456 at the Xcel Energy Center. For more photos, go to TwinCities.com.

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With the finest 21st-century technology has to offer and sans David Gilmour, Pink Floyd leader emeritus Roger Waters brings the theatrics to an '80s rite of rock passage.

By Ross Raihala
Pop Music Critic

Initially inspired by Roger Waters' growing contempt for his audience, Pink Floyd's 1979 album "The Wall" remains one of the biggest bums in the band's catalog.

Trading the stoned majesty of Pink Floyd's early work for a more brutal, paranoid tone, "The Wall" is overlong, too serious and often dull. Not to say it doesn't serve a purpose, as it's ideal for making sullen teens even gloomier. But like Stridex pads, the prom and butterscotch schnapps, it's one of those high school traditions most folks leave behind once they're holding a diploma.

And yet, Waters' blockbuster revival of the album for his current world tour, which hit the Xcel Energy Center Wednesday night, holds an almost magical appeal.

More akin to a theater piece than a traditional rock concert, the evening offered "The Wall" in its entirety, backed by eye-popping animation, customized film clips, a local children's choir

and one giant flying pig. It delivered dazzling goodies at nearly every turn, keeping the sold-out crowd of 15,456 in a nearly trance-like state as Waters sang of pain, alienation, loneliness and, well, more alienation. (The billowing clouds of reefer that floated through the X probably helped.)

The original tour for "The Wall" visited four cities and set a new standard for arena-rock pomp. The current tour, with more than 100 shows booked around the world, gives fans young and old a rare chance to turn back the clock and experience what they missed the first time around, only this time enhanced by the finest 21st-century technology \$201 tickets can fund.

Like most concept albums, "The Wall" works better the less attention you pay to the storyline. Throughout the first half of the show — there was an intermission at the point where you'd have to switch albums on the turntable — roadies methodically built a wall in front of the band. It's a relatively simple conceit that worked magnificently, with the increasingly large blank

space acting as canvas for the show's elaborate projected graphics.

Even more impressive was Waters' commitment to incorporating the entire arena into the proceedings, from the searchlights that scanned the crowd to the noisy sound effects that seemed to emanate from every corner of the place. The sheer epic scale of the performance made it one that will be difficult, if not impossible, to capture on film.

Waters' Pink Floyd bandmate David Gilmour has pledged to sit in on one of the tour's shows, and despite some Twitter-fed rumors fueled by sleazy scalpers, Gilmour did not show up at the X. (It took two guys to replace him — one on guitar and one on vocals.) Still, Pink Floyd was rarely about personalities in the first place, and Waters' band ably reproduced the necessary wall of sound.

Was the endlessly fascinating, utterly ridiculous spectacle ultimately just an expensive exercise in nostalgia (not to mention a late-career mea culpa from Waters)? Absolutely. Was it still worth it? Without a doubt.