

# Concert Review

## Keith Richards and The Xpensive Winos

Universal Amphitheatre, Wed, Jan. 23  
by Pat Kramer



KEITH RICHARDS

If you went to see Keith Richards to hear Rolling Stones cover tunes, you would have been disappointed with this show. With his second solo album, *Main Offender*, Richards' material is simpler lyrically and not as "hook driven". Though Richards' voice is unique in its hoarse, off-key quality, it became a bit redundant in the songs where he was providing lead vocals. Topping that off, the sound was too loud and distorted during this show, making it difficult to hear the songs. When Richards did speak to the audience, which was infrequent, it was unclear what he was saying. Mostly it comprised statements like, "Happy New Year", "Been awhile", and "Great crowd, great to be back, wish I could stay longer".

However, what the show lacked in sound, it made up for in style. Coming out on stage wearing his silver skull ring, a black jacket, jeans, a long white shirt, a black and white sash, and an orange tassel hanging from his belt, Richards displayed the air of "primitive cool" he's so well known for.

His stage antics were also a key point in the show. During the nearly 2-hour set, Richards played to the crowd, hunching over his guitar, twirling around, kicking out his leg, and striding across the stage with guitar outstretched. The only thing missing from the Richards' performance was the trademark cigarette dangling from

the corner of his mouth. Keith lit up only once - pausing near the end of the set to introduce the band.

Introduced by Richards as "forged in steel, encased in metal" the Xpensive Winos provided musicianship to Richards' style, putting forth an energetic and colorful show. Comprised of co-writer/

producers Waddy Wachtel and Steve Jordan, keyboardist Ivan Neville, bass player Jerome Smith, sax man Bobby Keys and vocalists extraordinaire Sarah Dash and Babi Floyd the Winos offered a strong lineup of backing musicians:

The direction Richards takes with this tour is a bit different from his work with The Stones. Richards says he is experimenting with new sounds. "A lot of the traditional musical forms I grew up with and love to play I've just tried to put a new twist on, like changing timings, making them not so structured in the verse-chorus-hook bag as much as I would with the Stones. We're still exploring and with this band, we can do it".

For the L.A. show, the set featured many straight ahead tunes off "Main Offender," "Talk is Cheap," and "Live at the Hollywood Palladium" with a sprinkling of Stones tunes. Keith's uneven vocals worked best on songs like "Wicked As It Seems," "You Take it so Hard," and "How I Wish." But the highlights of the show were the songs where the Winos were given some of the spotlight like in "Locked Away," when Neville's keyboard synthesizer turned his notes into a beautiful layering of acoustic guitar, complementing Richards' lead. Singer Sarah Dash added a nice touch to "Time is On My Side" with her slow, bluesy

delivery and long, sustained notes. Dash also greatly enhanced "Gimme Shelter" and "Bodytalks" while singer Babi Floyd provided gospel harmonies on "I Hate it When You Leave". On "Nine Tonight," Wachtel's steady lead, provided Richards the freedom to strum his guitar and add occasional guitar fills while he played to the crowd.

For simple, straight ahead rock, "Rip it Up," "Eileen," and, of course, "Happy" took the cake with Happy, showcasing the talents of the whole band. Their one-song encore, "Take it So Hard" ended the show with the entire band, holding hands and taking a bow. This small gesture conveyed the closeness of the band which Richards described in this way. "I thrive on the loyalty of a band, that dedication, to be able to pull the same guys back together. It's very unusual to be able to do that and it's amazing that all these guys came back again".

Though he is getting up there in age for his solo efforts, Richards has already carved his place in history as a rock icon. While his role models were Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and John Lee Hooker, Richards style is copied more than any other rock figure today.

After 30 years with the Stones, Keith Richards is an institution.

A friend once told me that there are two things that will always stand the test of time: cockroaches and Keith Richards. Given his history of excesses, his ability to prevail is truly awe inspiring. Seeing him at Universal Amphitheater, up close for a very personal display of his own music was an exciting and long awaited opportunity.

Opening band, Sole Asylum, played a short but very loud set of grunge rock/alternative music which, despite its volume, was musically engaging. "Shove Me," "Runaway Train" and "To Sir With Love" were favorite parts of the show.

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