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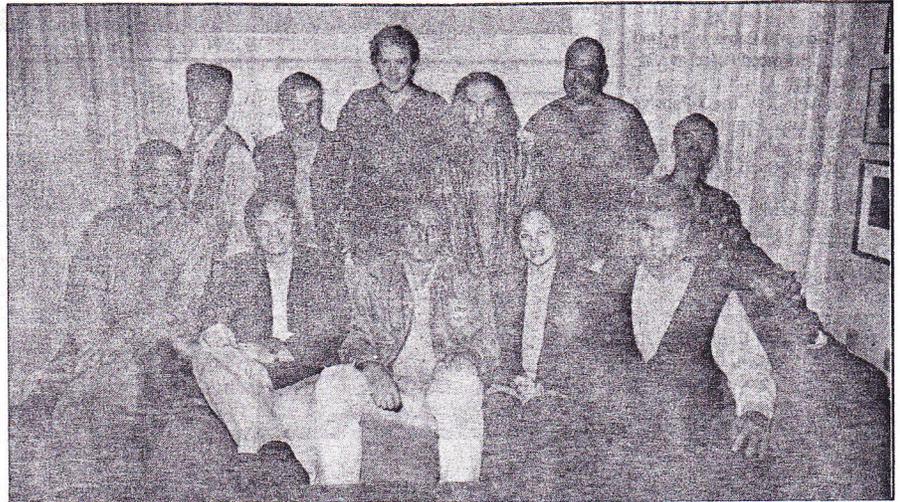
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Concert Review

"Oingo Boingo"

Universal Amphitheatre, Wed, Jan. 13

by Pat Kramer



Going to a Oingo Boingo show is akin to going to the gym for a good workout. Such was the case for the opening night of the band's five-night stand at Universal Amphitheater where bandleader Danny Elfman and his 13-piece band led fans through a dizzying, frantically-paced rollercoaster ride through 25 of Boingo's high energy, lyrically potent favorites.

Elfman has spent the last couple of years scoring feature films like "Batman", "Batman Returns", "Dick Tracy", "Midnight Run" and "Edward Scissorhands" as well as the popular Fox tv show "The Simpsons" and the soon-to-be released movie, "Sommersby" starring Richard Gere and Jodi Foster.

Taking a break from his composing duties for the time being, Elfman and band returned to play a strong 2-hour set featuring a treasure trove of Boingo favorites. The show opened with a 9-piece drum section, a children's choir and members of the "Sad Clown Orchestra", for a new number entitled "Insanity". The African drums, congas, xylophones, sax, guitars and keyboards created another typical Elfman composition multi-layered, with perfect harmonies but decidedly pointed lyrics. Their next song, "War" similarly offered Elfman's politically charged viewpoint with lyrics like "don't you know our kids are dumb but our bombs are smart".

Most of the show, however, was dedicated to the pure pleasure of fans with recognizable favorites

like the exuberant "No Spill Blood", "Dead Man's Party", "Stay", "Skin", "Out of Control" and "Flesh and Blood". The band performed efficiently with little delay between songs except when Elfman paused to offer a comment here and there. In keeping with the Oingo Boingo skeleton and bones theme, he finished the beautiful "We Close Our Eyes" which celebrates life asking "then what happens? We go and die, that's what happens", plunging right into "Let's Have a Party", another rocking, energetic tune.

Oingo Boingo's success with fans is to a large degree due to their "no worry" attitude contrasting the themes of life and death in most of their songs. The composition of the songs often builds to a crescendo, offering fans who are known to be rather vigorous, a great release from pent up frustrations.

The versatility of the band contributes to their unique sound drawing on unusual musical instruments like the "ballaphones" used by Elfman and bass player John Avida, bells, African drums, a 3-piece horn section and several varieties of strings and percussion. Additional players on stage for the show, who Elfman introduced as "The Sad Clown Orchestra" augmented the sound with percussion, accordion, guitar and keyboard layering. The only song which strayed from the normal selection was the Beatles "I Am the Walrus".

Though the material is sometimes dark, Oingo Boingo always manages to keep spirits up

with entertaining musicianship and incisive lyrics. For their encore, Elfman and band performed "Grey Matter", "Gratitude", "House of Pain", and the first song the band ever recorded "Only a Lad".

Since 1979, Oingo Boingo's been building a steady legion of fans. This show ensured there are many more out there. In the first of the five shows the house was packed with two additional shows sold out as well. With a prosperous career in songwriting, Danny Elfman, the genius behind the band does not need to perform anymore. However, in what seemed a tribute and a thankyou to his fans, he put on a great live show, well endowed with his powerful vocals.

The band returns to the studio in April to record the first album with Giant Records, who they signed with last fall after a long residency with MCA. A September release is anticipated for the record with a national tour follow. Also this fall, a longterm project between Elfman and producer Tim Burdon comes to fruition with the feature length animated movie "Nightmare Before Christmas". Listen for Elfman as the voice for the main character. He's also scored the movie and written all the songs used in it. With a career this successful, fans can feel somewhat fortunate that Oingo Boingo continues to create new, dynamic songs with the primitive power to keep them dancing to the beat of life and death.