

John's Medusa tour freezes time

BY KEVIN LANGSTON
ENCORE EDITOR

"And all this science I don't understand."

Perhaps this line from Elton John's "Rocket Man" was the foundation of his current Medusa Tour, where it is just the man and his piano. John left behind the band, packed up his powerful voice, his piano and his song catalog, and presented them in front of a packed Carolina Coliseum Friday night.

"It's good to play in front of a real audience," John said when he sat himself down behind his Yamaha. Cameras provided a live video of the concert on large screens that flanked the stage. He then wasted no time before he started pouring out the hits. The crowd, having just sat down, rose at the familiar sound of "Your Song." John's voice was as powerful as ever as he ran over this timeless classic.

From then on, the hits kept coming. "Daniel" followed in the early part of the show, and John later belted out "Border Song" and did an amazing improvisational solo for "Honky Cat." But the early highlight of the show was "Rocket Man." The opening lines, "she packed my bags last night pre-flight," were met with a huge ovation. From there, John pumped life into one of his most famous songs.

He sang it as if he were singing it for the first time, with a careful and delicate sense that only he could give it. The song lasted for several minutes, as John entered into another improvisation piano solo. Both the crowd and John were eating it up.

Most fans would have thought they had just seen the show's pinnacle. They would have been wrong.

John did not have a weak song in the entire show. Whether it was a more popular song like "Daniel" or "Honky Cat" or a lesser-known song like "Ticking" or "Blessed," John gave each a flawless performance and, in turn, received many ovations from the loving crowd.

Never did John show signs of tiring or of disillusioned routine. He treated each song individually, knowing that each was probably a favorite in someone's heart. It was refreshing to hear the relatively younger song "I Guess That's Why They Call It The Blues" mixed in with his more recognizable hits.

John had obviously defied any possible generation gaps throughout his career, and the ovation met with this song proved it. He is a performer that time and generations don't apply to.

"Better Off Dead," from his album *Captain*

Fantastic And The Brown Dirt Cowboy, mixed up the show's pace a little, but John gave both talents of voice and piano-playing ability the spotlight that evening.

At the midpoint of the show, John told the audience that he was going to perform a long instrumental piece. The beautiful solo reminded fans that John is not only a skilled singer, but that he can also write some beautiful and challenging music, as well.

There was a slight pause before he went on with his piano solo. He eventually transitioned the solo into his next song, "Take Me To The Pilot." John was no more powerful than he was at that moment. His jaunty piano playing matched with his voice made this song one of the show's highlights.

"Tiny Dancer" was a popular favorite and one of John's best efforts in the vocal aspect. His voice, although lacking the range he once had, has not aged in any other way. He can still deliver the words he loves so much with a confidence and love that prove his worth as a rock legend.

John, up to this point, had given the Coliseum's crowd an incredible show, but he was determined to end on a high note—or several, for that matter.

"The One" was a spiritual experience for those present. The beautiful love song more or less tied together all generations in attendance that night. "Can You Feel The Love Tonight" was accompanied by scenes from Disney's "The Lion King" on the giant screens. Audience members gazed at the colorful scenes of

the movie John had provided the soundtrack to. The mixing of visual and auditory elements made the show that much more effective.

The screens were used again for "Empty Garden," John's tribute to his friend John Lennon. John preceded the song by saying he hadn't performed it in a long time, and that is had been painful to perform in the past.

As he offered his loving tribute to Lennon, various candid shots and scenes from Lennon's life flashed on the screens. It was a moving moment and a reminder of the late great rock legend.

The crowd, throughout most of the show, had been fairly reserved in behavior, but when John launched into "Crocodile Rock," many fans rushed to the stage to dance and sing along to the poppy rock song.

"Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me," one of his most popular songs, was one of the last he performed. The gentle notes on the piano matched with John's eloquent voice, making this song unforgettable in comparison.

The crowd, sensing the show was near its end, remained on their feet for this performance, paying homage to John.

Refusing to end the show with a "sad" song,

John, after taking the appropriate bows, walked back to the keys and struck the first chord to "Benny And The Jets." The crowd had never been louder. John walked from his piano and taunted the crowd to make more noise. "Let me hear it," he said as he raised his hand to his ear.

The crowd gave him an exuberant ovation, and he went into the most demanded song of the night. The audience knew their part, and they clapped the beat along. John then left the stage and disappeared into the darkness of the backstage.

No one was surprised when he returned to the stage minutes after the crowd kept cheering. "It's so easy to play for fans like you. Thank you, Columbia," he said as he took his seat behind his stage companion.

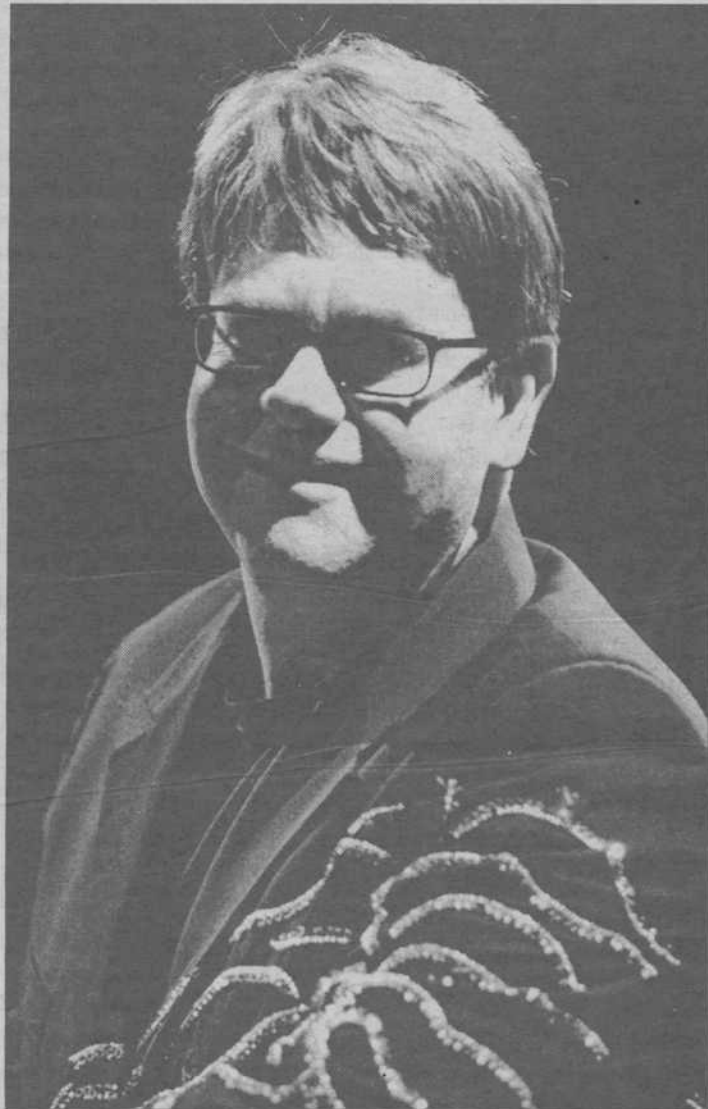
The show would end with John's most popular song, "Candle In The Wind." This song about a young Marilyn Monroe is one of the most beloved songs on the 20th century.

John touched all emotions that night and proved to the audience that he can go at it alone. The set was nearly three hours in length, with few breaks and intermissions. John drew a lot of baby boomers to the Coliseum, but they quickly forgot their age and returned to a time when songs like "Benny And The Jets," "Crocodile Rock" and "Tiny Dancer" were radio hits.

My aunt Judy can tell me the exact time and place when she first knew she was an Elton John fan: "It was June 4, 1972. I heard 'Rocket Man' on the radio. It was No. 1 that day."

The fact that she remembers this, and that I can remember her telling me this, is remarkable, but it is also a true testament to John's uncanny talent and ability. John has that ability to touch the soul of any willing listener.

He has captured the hearts, ears and souls of



PHOTOS BY SEAN RAYFORD THE GAMECOCK

Elton John smiles as he performs "Your Song" Friday night at the Carolina Coliseum. John performed for three hours, and the set list included such hits as "Benny And The Jets," "The One" and "Border Song."

many loving and devoted fans. He can make you laugh and make you cry in the same breath of words. It's no wonder he is one of the most celebrated entertainers of the past 50 years. If it's good enough for Judy...

Though I felt quite out of place among the older crowd, I appreciated what they were celebrating. For all I know, they were my age and seeing this incredible person for the first time. If they were, they understood as I sat there awestruck for three hours.

From the young man in the second row from the floor, who sees him as something more than a singer and piano player, more than just our Elton John.

gamecockencore@hotmail.com

gamecockencore@hotmail.com

gamecockencore@hotmail.com

Were ready to believe you!!!