

**PATTI SMITH**  
**WARFIELD**  
**OCTOBER 20, 2008**

**THIS IS WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE WHEN DOVES CRY**



Monday night our Island-Life Event Coordinator managed to score prized tickets for the sold-out show of Patti Smith at the Warfield. Patti looked at her calendar, and, even though she is not on tour, called up her manager on stopover from Australian dates to book a date in Babylon for Rimbaud's birthday, and a subsequent date in Paris on the following evening.

If all you can recall about Patti Smith is a 1980's hit made famous by Bruce Springsteen called "Because the Night" you are missing quite a lot. And if you think a Patti Smith concert is just another rock concert, well guess again.

Onetime poet and sculptor in Greenwich Village, she made early association with the likes of Bob Dylan, who counts her as a major influence to this day, and with Robert Mapplethorpe, who became photography's enfant terrible and a major influence upon portrait art before his early death due to AIDS.

How she found herself performing punk rock music is perhaps the subject of a dense biography, but her albums exploded on the scene like minor volcanoes, from Radio Ethiopia to 1975's "Horses".

As reviewer Jim Harrington has mentioned, its difficult to write about a Patti Smith concert, which never has a moment of traditional rock experience. "For those who have yet to witness their first Patti Smith show, it's really difficult to sum up the experience. It's one of those cases where the famed quote, "Writing about music is like dancing about architecture" truly seems appropriate."

Who else can get the entire audience to sing "Happy Birthday" to a French poet who died in 1890?

In no particular order the Patti Smith Group did the following numbers:

Frederick  
Because the night  
Dancing barefoot  
Southern cross - with director of biopic movie "Dream of Life", Steven Sebring,  
Aint it strange  
Redondo Beach  
Birdland - indescribable, elevating poetry

Free money  
Are you experienced? -- Jimi Hendrix cover  
Helpless - in memory of husband Fred Sonic Smith, performed with son, Jackson Smith  
Horses - changed lyrics  
Smells Like Teen Spirit.- Nirvana song, with Patti interpolating memories of seeing him.  
Gloria  
Encore:  
People have the power  
Rock 'n Roll N -----

The concert lasted a brief 2+ hours and became more and more intense as the evening went on.

As usual with Patti, she interacted directly with the audience, with individuals and as a group. Although hitting 62 this year (birthdate is December 30) her voice remains so powerful that the mike would capture her vocals even when she turned her back. At one point she paused in mid song to chide someone in the "pit" to leave someone alone. "Hey! Stop that! He aint bothering you. Leave him alone!"

Although capable of being about as savage as they come, Patti reminded us of her humanity and her humble origins in relating an event that took place when she worked in a New Jersey factory at age 16. The floor boss came up to her and ordered her to go to the bathroom, because "they're waiting for you."

"I walked in and there were three women with no teeth there and one of them took my book away from me. It was *Illuminations*." Patti said.

*Illuminations* is the title of one of Arthur Rimbaud's influential works. The other is *Season in Hell*.

Those of us who have worked warehouses and factory shifts can identify with what came next. Because the woman found French language in the book, they became outraged and pushed young Patti's head into the toilet after destroying the book.

Most remarkable was Patti Smith's generous response there at the Warfield that night, for she said, "Those were good,decent and hardworking people. A bit uneducated, but decent nevertheless. They didn't like that there was this language that was not "American" to be around them. What we want is for those days and that way of thinking never to come again . . .".

This was greeted by thunderous cheers. That really is the thing which tips the balance from being just a very good rock artist into the next level, and makes us fall in love with the girl again and again. Of the original Band, only Lenny Kaye is left. Richard Sohl, Tom Verlaine, her husband Fred Smith, all gone. But Patti, sweet Patti remains defiant and not the slightest bit reduced or compromised. With Patti Smith there are no half-measures. You must love her passionately or put her aside.

Because of the times now and the times we are all about to face -- of which Patti reminded us at one point -- the concert conveyed powerful resonance -- "We are about to face some hard times, some really hard, hard times and we must get together and rebuild this entire country brick by brick . . .". the entire effect was powerful, emotive, overwhelming.

This is just to say, like any good poem, the concert lifted the top of the head off.

To Jim Harrington's question, "Did it feel like a particularly moving night of music?" we answer a resounding YES!

We left before Rock 'n Rock N -----, which is a song that requires at least an essay if not a book for a response.

But then, maybe all of her works demand a response, for differing reasons, that large. Which just might be the highest accolade to a performing artist we can devise.