

LOU REED - Berkeley Community Theatre

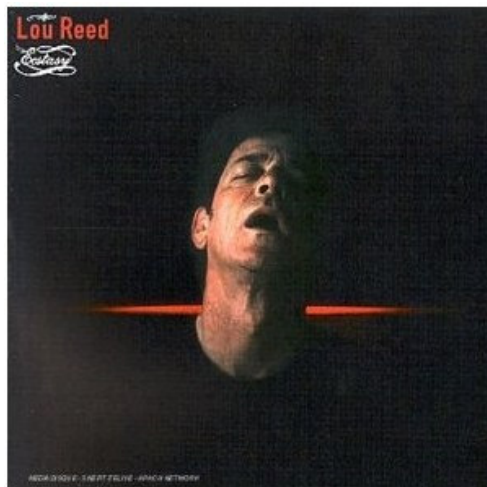
June 11, 2000



The sun shone on the past weekend with glorious fog-free weather. Minor festivities took place up in Berkeley and over in Babylon and nobody got hurt. The chosen few who filed in to see Lou Reed at the Berkeley Community Theatre got the benefit of the best performance from the old legend in years. Pulling almost exclusively from new material for 2.5 hours, Lou gave a lesson to all the musicians in the audience on how to Do It Right. Some of his shows have been lacking in Oomph in recent years with presentations that made him appear as if the man would rather stay at home in bed than rock, but Thursday night Lou

kicked off with a rumbling in the gut performance of "Paranoia in E". He tossed in a few numbers from 1984 and 1990, before filling out the rest of the set entirely with extended jams from the recent Ecstasy CD, ignoring the drunken frat-boy calls in the audience for older material.

Guitarist Lou Reed co-founded and wrote most of the songs for the New York rock group The Velvet Underground (1965-70), the influential band which recorded such cult favorites as "Heroin," "Sweet Jane" and "Sister Ray." The Velvet Underground, at first associated with Andy Warhol and the singer Nico, was never a huge popular success, but it has been credited with influencing a generation of punk and post-punk rockers in the 1970s and '80s. During the '70s Reed and David Bowie were among the top acts in "glam rock," a theatrical style of gender-bending rock and roll. Reed's solo hits from the '70s include "Walk On The Wild Side" and "Street Hassle," as well as re-vamped versions of several of his Velvet Underground songs. By the end of the 1990s, Reed was an elder statesman of rock and roll, a mature songwriter with a reputation for thoughtful urban ballads. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997.



His backup sounded professional and tight at every moment, with the bassist turning out stellar performances on his custom 6-string jazz bass and electric cello. The drummer, Tommy Smith, also presented rhythms of astonishing complexity, putting aside the traditional "bang, bang, tish, bang" of conventional rock bands.

Not until the entire crowd rose to a standing five-minute ovation did Lou consent to put out a few gems that made him famous, such as "Sweet Jane" and "Dirty Boulevard". Lou Reed is famous for avoiding re-hashing the same old material from the virtual Greatest Hits collection, often providing only perfunctory versions when forced to do so. You have to admire an artist who works hard at presenting fresh material in lieu of sticking with the old -- and frequently tiresome -- tried and true material. For those who wanted an evening of hearing "Lou's Greatest Hits", I say, go out and buy the records. Sounds the same every time you play it. If you want to hear fresh, exciting, vital stuff, grab the latest performance as it swings by on tour.