

# Brave Words

Philadelphia, PA

October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## **BLACKMORE'S NIGHT – Men In Tights: Live In Philly**

Like the Mel Brook's movie from which I stole the title, BLACKMORE'S NIGHT is part ode to the Medieval times, part musical comedy. The week of Halloween, perfect for playing dress up, as a large Ren-Faire attired, artichoke and asparagus mead drinking contingent invaded World Café, in the heart of Philadelphia's collegiate neighbourhood. Wenches in flowing dresses, corsets and halos of flowers woven into their hair were escorted by an assortment of male characters ranging from puffy shirt Musketeers, Lost Horizon band wannabes and the caped Ming The Merciless from the campy '70s Flash Gordon film. The venue is a sit-down, two drink minimum, dinner theatre, with SRO bar in the back (for yours truly).

Strolling onstage after the 'God Save The Keg', to applause and a few handshakes to those down front, Ritchie Blackmore and band launch into 'Locked Within The Crystal Ball', soon to be joined by vocalist (in blue/green peasant dress, she doubles on shawm, penny whistle and other time-appropriate woodwinds). The stage remained dimly lit, offstage effects pulsating blue and red as violin is added. 'Queen For A Day' followed, then Night (recently married to Blackmore, after nearly two dec ades together) began her stand-up inspired banter. Referring to his proclivity for drink, she quipped, "Ritchie became a musician after hearing music is measured in bars!" 'Under A Violet Moon' was the first crowd sing-along of the evening, appropriate purple lights accenting the stage, as Night tapped a tambourine and Blackmore slid to his knees at the front of the stage (in best mock rock star pose). He even led the "Yeah" cheers. Early on it was evident the (once?) temperamental guitarist, famed for his fits throughout his stints with Deep Purple

and Rainbow, was in an uncharacteristically jovial mood. His wife offered, “It’s going to be a good night, Ritchie’s found the drinks already.” Actually, the once silent/stoic man in black all but spoke directly into the microphone, prodding his wife to mention specific historical aspects of each song and willingly playing the straight man in their George Burns-Gracie Allen partnership.

‘Renaissance Faire’ saw the guitarist on an electrified acoustic, his patented cream-colored Strat never to be unleashed this evening. The rarely aired ‘Minstrel Hall’ instrumental, the first song written for Blackmore’s Night, saw its composer in virtual darkness, seated on a stool. During the touching solo, a costumed rabbit walked across the stage (shades of Jimmy Stewart’s Harvey?) That ill-mannered Blackmore is definitely years removed, as the guitar maestro was willingly upstaged by a children’s playland mascot!

After the near bedlam in having the audience ask for requests (cue indecipherable shouting and the odd clearly audible response: ‘Freebird’?), Ritchie busts into the traditional rendition of ‘Greensleeves’, as a solo. The second time through Candice sang the rarely heard lyrics, eventually adlibbing, “Drinking was his delight,” as it deteriorated into laughter. At least on this evening, Blackmore’s Night was free-form, often morphing from non-sequitor song to a snippet of something else, the occasional solo (by others, as well as Blackmore) or comedic bit. As if to prove the point, the raucous had clapping and concertina punctuated ‘Home Again’ provided a musical education. This extended version included Khachaturian’s ‘Sabre Dance’, ‘Hava Nagila’, beer hall anthem “Drink, Drink’ courtesy of the keyboardist (piano, harpsichord and organ), Germanic ‘Happy Wanderer’ (“valderi, valdera... with a knapsack on my back”) even saw the happy couple whirl, arm-in-arm square dance/Virginia Reel style. Night good naturedly lamented, “It’s turned into a vaudeville show,” before finally reprising ‘Home Again’.

The original JOAN BAEZ penned folk version of 'Diamonds & Rust' saw the duo seated center stage. Violin came in for the second verse. Undoubtedly the lyrics could reflect the early years of their relationship. 'Toast To Tomorrow', adapted from a Ukrainian folk song, has that Russian melody (think rollicking Cassock dance. "Hey!") Was it just a coincidence the stage was bathed in red throughout? 'Durch Den Wald Zum Bach Haus', an instrumental, highlighted violinist/fiddler Gypsy Rose. 'World Of Stone' began with monk chanting and even though he toyed with a short harpsichord solo (which included a joke about phone ring-tones), Bard David Of Larchmont was given a proper solo, spotlighted and alone on an otherwise darkened stage. A drum solo was also forthcoming.

'Wish You Were Here' (off the Winter Carols CD) was something of a surprise, segueing seamlessly into 'Ocean Gypsy'. 'Fires At Midnight' started on acoustic guitar, peppering up briefly, despite its languid pace. A lengthy acoustic solo reached crescendo in the song's conclusion. 'Ghost Of A Rose' and 'Wind In The Willows' were more upbeat, but given the start: humorous and lilting, much of what followed was more sombre, almost melancholy (much like a drinking episode: cheerful and fun loving, until the alcohol all hits at once, later in the evening, things becoming slower and more introspective). No 'Way To Mandalay', no 'Cartouche', no 'Old Mill Inn' and certainly none of the re-worked RAINBOW/PURPLE epics: 'Child In Time', 'Street Of Dreams', nor 'Soldier Of Fortune'. Not even 'Rainbow Eyes'. Guess Ritchie wasn't feeling it, as Candice has admitted in interviews that essentially he picks the setlist based on his mood, even changing things mid-concert if he so desires. 'I Still Remember' saw the disco ball radiate "stars" at the appropriate lyric, while 'The Clock Ticks On' prophetically enough, completed the show, just short of midnight. Begun as a hurdy gurdy solo, the effect was a haunting, almost Arabian melody. The house lights came on and 'Snoopy vs. The Red Baron' (by THE ROYAL GUARDSMEN) came over the loudspeakers. By the time the song finished, almost the entire place had emptied. Aware of Blackmore's personality and the night's lack of any electrified rock chords (as on the previous pair of concerts witnessed), I stayed put, hoping he'd have a change of heart, regardless of the crowd size. Alas, it was not to be.