
Crowd Review – Concert at O-week, University of Tasmania



Photograph by Alan Moyle courtesy of Wombat@Photobat. Xavier Rudd and Dexter concert was part of University of Tasmania O-week program, February 23rd, 2004.

Early crowd entrails began to greet me as I walked down Sandy Bay Road. Two gentlemen sat on chairs on the footpath by a service station, raising beers to the traffic. Another appeared to be trying to hitch a lift on a postal van, but promptly proved me wrong when, roundly rejected, he began to walk directly away from the main crowd gathered to watch Bodyjar, Xavier Rudd, Dexter and local band Reflex for the University of Tasmania O-week festivities.

I arrived towards the end of Reflex's set, joining a small crowd of other non-university students too stingy to pay the \$20 entry fee. Our group numbered about 20 – most seemed young and sort of trendy, though there was also a young girl about 12 in a green school uniform who appeared to find the hill particularly entertaining, supplying as it did something to roll down. We were also thankful for the hill – it provided a view over the black fences to such important things as the stage and the majority of those who had gathered.

I chatted to a friend of mine on security, who seemed to think it would be a bad night. "People have been drinking all day," he said.

At this stage though, the crowd seemed quiet and indeed oblivious to anything going on around them

– you wouldn't think they were there for a concert. A small group, gently rivaling my own band of hilltop hoods for numbers, danced up near the stage. Surrounding them was an arc of green – there must have been at least thirty metres of grass before the other two thousand odd people began to make appearances.

I counted five people sitting on their own. In the main, they were sitting in groups of around four to ten, talking about things and laughing. Most of them seemed to be university students, though I did see one guy I knew who had recently graduated. I imagine his student card was valid until March.

A girl sidestepped up and deliberately bumped into a male friend to say hello. Someone took a swig of a beer. I chatted to a nice bloke from Victoria for a while about wilderness and Forestry Tasmania. His name was Ben, like mine. He also had blond hair, a thin beard and hippyish clothes like me. He was hoping to see Xavier Rudd, and he told me that it was important to protect places that other people hadn't messed up. He was going to film some of them. He borrowed my

pen, then left.

Bodyjar began to play. The crowd were allowed to like Bodyjar – they were from the mainland. The arc of green was eaten up by people who started to dance around a bit. More people started running around for little apparent reason, and a few more people took swigs of beers. The group at the front of the stage now outstripped my little group in the population stakes. Even some people way up the back began to jiggle a bit. The singer from Bodyjar described the crowd as “fucking awesome,” which I think perhaps was overstating the case a bit. Someone behind me confirmed my suspicion.

“Where are the Goths?” he called out. A friend of mine agreed, commenting that the scene below was a “sea of mediocrity.” I thought this was a little harsh. When Xavier came out to play, for instance, there was an entirely different set of front rowers by the stage than previously. Talk about diversity.

I wandered around behind the stage to watch the crowd for part of Xavier’s set. There was a yellow light shining on them, and some people were sitting on the shoulders of other members of the crowd, presumably with their permission. A lot of people were clapping and singing along at this point, looking adoringly at the bloke on the stage, who must have felt a bit like a Roman emperor. At some point, fireworks went off, as did flares around the actual crowd, making the place feel a bit like a war zone. But everyone was obliging with oohs and aahs, and I was gradually becoming less and less inclined to think that the crowd should give up its day job.

This was confirmed to me by their reactions to Dexter’s set, which I ended up spending backstage in search of an ill-fated interview with Xavier Rudd. For a start, there were a couple of very friendly guys there – one from Launceston, the other from Marion Bay, who even went to the trouble of offering me a drink. Additionally, if you wandered up to the fence by the stage, it got to the point where all you could see was crowd – crowd was all, and all was crowd. Crowd blocked the view on the flat, and crowd rose up the hill in the background. Being so close to such an overwhelming display of crowd, and yet not a part of it, was an intriguing experience which is rarely likely to be repeated.

In the end, then, the crowd seemed fairly successful in performing its role as “crowd,” really getting into the spirit of the evening and largely having a good time. They danced and yelled and sang and clapped at the appropriate times, and did not in general give me anything to be overly cynical about. I give the crowd three stars.

Benny Walter is a writer in the Orwellian tradition – that is to say, he washes dishes to pay the bills. He is interested in most things, and finds cheese particularly attractive.