

MUSIC REVIEW

Tom Rush celebrates 50 years with his friends

By Joseph P. Kahn | GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 31, 2012



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Tom Rush, with Paul Guzzone on bass, performing on Friday at Symphony Hall.

Looking more like Mark Twain with each passing year, a white-suited, snowy-maned Tom Rush took to the Symphony Hall stage Friday to celebrate 50 years of making music — and musical friends — with a three-hour concert touching upon virtually every phase of the folksinger's celebrated career.

A reprise of the New Year's shows he hosted in the 1980s, the Web-streamed concert affirmed not only Rush's standing as a brilliant singer-songwriter and masterful guitarist but also his influence on fellow artists like guest performer Jonathan Edwards ("Tom's been like a father to me," quipped Edwards, one of many cracks about the 71-year old Rush's age that were made during the show) and younger talents like Dom Flemons of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, whose three-song set was the evening's most rousing.

Rush opened with "Hot Tonight," a promise of lively times to come, then ceded the stage to his other guests, working both solo and in group configurations.

Among the highlights: David Buskin and Robin Batteau explaining hilariously why "Jews Don't Camp"; Edwards crooning "Hard Times (Come Again No More)," then harmonizing with Eric Lilljequist and Dean Adrien on the Lennon-McCartney ballad "Yes It Is"; Flemons demonstrating his extraordinary prowess on banjo, guitar, harmonica, and bones on tunes like "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine" by Papa Charlie Jackson; and David Bromberg (subbing for an ailing Nanci Griffith) moaning the "Statesboro Blues," with Flemons wailing alongside him on harmonica.

Following intermission, Rush took over with a set list that included Jesse Fuller's "San Francisco Bay Blues," from Rush's 1962 debut album; "Maggie," from "Ladies Love Outlaws" (1974); "Mama Don't Allow," a tune Rush learned from bluesman Sleepy John Estes long ago at Cambridge's Club 47; Joni Mitchell's classic "Urge for Going"; "What I Know," the title track from Rush's most recent album; the Geoff Muldaur instrumental "Mole's Moan"; and Rush's own much-covered "No Regrets" — "a medley of my greatest hit," as he wryly put it.

Backing Rush, in addition to the others, were Paul Guzzone on bass, percussionist Marshal Rosenberg, guitarist Trevor Veitch, and Joe Mennonna on saxophone. Not a bad house band. And not a bad house in which to put one, either.

For an encore, Rush sang “One More Time Around the Sun,” a new sea chantey of his, followed by “Wasn’t That a Mighty Storm,” an account of the devastating 1900 Galveston, Texas, hurricane. He dedicated it to the victims of Hurricane Sandy, a fitting note on which to close a milestone anniversary show that looked forward optimistically while celebrating its deep and enduring roots.

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