

Mike Keneally Tour 88 Diaries (7/27)

Newly hired stunt guitarist Mike Keneally kept an audio journal during most of Frank Zappa's 1988 "Broadway The Hard Way" tour that included set lists, backstage goings-on and many personal observations. Here are the transcripts of Mike's diaries, originally posted in chronological order on their 10-year anniversary dates.

FEBRUARY 15 1988

Hello, it's early in the morning on February 15, 1988. Yesterday was Valentine's Day which was spent unhappily here without my wife nearby. So I just slept most of the day...one reason why I slept most of the day was, the night before I went out to get some ice after I got done with my diary entry, and Bruce was out there and we wanted to talk to me about some of the problems in the band. So I went in his room and we sat and talked for a few minutes, and then Walt called and said that he was in Albert's room and did we want to come over. So we went over to Albert's room and me and Walt and Albert and Bruce sat around drinking these little airplane whisky bottles of which Albert has an impressive collection - actually I guess it was Walt's room, because Bruce had to go over to Albert's room to get the drinks. So we sat in Walt's room listening to the sounds of all kinds of insane partying going on next door - I don't know who was responsible for the party, but they sure were loud. The end result of all this is that I finally got back to my room about 6:30, and finally got to sleep around 7:00 AM or so, and then I got another call from Bruce around 7:30 to wrap up some issues from earlier in the evening, and I really got to sleep around 8:00 and woke up at 2:45 PM, and took a shower and went down to the lobby and then went to rehearsal.

Today at rehearsal we practiced "Zoot Allures" and "Honey, Don't You Want A Man Like Me" and I think that might have been it. Most of the rehearsal was spent with Frank working on his guitar tone. At one point Frank went up to Ed's station to play Ed's Silicon Mallet Instrument because he was planning on doing a duet with Ed during the show, but for some reason that never quite materialized. Let me turn off the TV, it's distracting me...oh, this is interesting --- "Help Me, Rhonda."

"Help me Rhonda, help, help me Rhonda...' It's "Classic Rock" from Time-Life Music! --- " CLICK.

I'm reading this book about the Beach Boys now and "Help Me, Rhonda" just reared its head. Oh, we also rehearsed "Sleep Dirt" today, and corrected some wrong notes in "Sofa", and that was about it. "Zoot Allures" was the one new tour premiere tonight. And Frank asked me if I knew "Hungry Freaks, Daddy" and I knew the first part of it but when it got to the weirder chords they didn't spring immediately to my fingers and he said "Oop! Encyclopedia failure." And when dinner came around I took the Telecaster and went to a spare dressing room and figured out the chords, and then walked in to where he was having dinner and told him I'd learned the song, and he said we'd try it at the next soundcheck. Scott berated me for not bringing all my Zappa CDs on the road, because he had his portable CD player with him. But then he sat in the room while I was figuring out "Hungry Freaks" and bragged to his girlfriend about how immaculate my ear was and how I was able to recall all these chords from memory, a skill which he seems to think is beyond him, although I feel differently. Scott is at least as amazing as I am. After that I just hung out on the couch with Scott and Freddie, taking it easy for an hour and a half.

Then the show began. Set One: "Black Page", "No Heart" - our Valentine's Day song, "Love Of My Life" - a more conventionally appropriate Valentine's Day song, "Alien Orifice", which was really tight and together tonight, "Any Kind Of Pain", "Jesus", "Lie's So Big" and "Baritone Women" - which are most of the components of the "Republican Retrospective Medley" but in a slightly different order, as you'll note, "City of Tiny Lites" and "A Pound For A Brown". During "Pound For A Brown" Frank mentioned that, in deference to equal time and fairness, he was bringing out a member of the Reagan administration to present a balanced viewpoint on stage. And this guy whose name is A. West - who was there with his friend, they're apparently part of some kind of performing team, they were at The Huddle and discussed some of the things which would be said on stage - came out and berated Frank and berated the audience and explained how it was important to spend money on arms for the Contras, and took off his overcoat and he was wearing fatigues, and said "I'll be going down to Nicaragua as soon as this performance is through". A good selection of cliches presented with a lot of energy, it was really quite impressive. The audience was screaming and throwing things at him, and during the break it became clear to Frank that a lot of the people thought he was for real, so the next set began with Frank assuring the audience that the guy was a friend of his, and not to hurt him if they happened to see him later on.

(1998 comment: This performance was later released as "A Few Moments with Brother A. West" on "The Best Band You Never Heard In Your Life". A. West was also the artist responsible for the graphics on the "Broadway The Hard Way" album and "The Real Frank Zappa Book".)

There was somebody in the audience who had passed out a piece of paper with a bunch of requests. Among the requests was to conduct the audience, to have the band do a dance number a la "Approximate", to sing something

acapella, to have Chad sing, and to have Ike do a solo performance with his percussion paraphernalia. And all of these things occurred. First Frank conducted the audience with his various hand signals as seen on "Video From Hell", and then Frank held his microphone up to Chad and Chad sang "The Love Boat" theme, which managed to find itself into several other tunes during the show. For the band dance, a bunch of us went up to the front of the stage; there were me and Scott and Ike and Paul and Ed and Bruce, I'm not sure whether Bobby was there or not - Bobby and Ike were feeling poorly from the night before, they'd been up all night, and it was great that they both got the first solos on "Pound For A Brown", they were barely able to remain upright - back to the dance number: Paul had a copy of the music to "Approximate" and put it down on the floor, and we read that and danced the music. There were some people from the audience who joined us, including one transvestite whose name I can't recall. It may have been Sparky. And then Ike played with his toys, including the ray gun I'd given to Ed, his honker, his beeper, his bdlmbdlmbdlmbdlm - I can't remember the name of that thing, the thing that goes bdlmbdlmbdlm when you say "ointment" in "Florentine Pogen". And for the acapella performance, Frank, Bobby, Ike and I sang "The Closer You Are", punctuated by Frank conducting the audience. And that went over well. Frank continued conducting the audience periodically throughout the rest of the set.

Set two proper began with a very good version of "Montana" - actually the whole set was very good - then "Why Don't You Like Me", "Peace Corps", "Torture/Lonesome", "King Kong" with Frank playing more fun-type Synclavier stuff, doing duets with some people in the horn section, but he never got up to the Silicon Mallet, unfortunately, 'cause that would have been cool. And "Stairway To Heaven", during which Scott had the Reagan mask on, and cavorted with me while I was down on my knees at the front of the stage. Then we went away. Oh, hold on...ACHOOO!!!...then we came back for the first encore which was "Zoot Allures" and "Peaches" - kind of low key, probably not the best songs to do for an encore right then; although they were both totally adequate it didn't really sustain the energy very effectively. Oh well. Maybe the energy didn't need sustaining right then. And then we came back for the second encore which was "The Illinois Enema Bandit", which I don't play on, so I went back to the horn riser and stood between Paul and Albert, and Paul handed me his soprano sax, and Bob Rice got me a pair of dark glasses and I swayed and swooned in a jazzlike fashion, which was darn good fun. I found one note which was in key and honked that repeatedly.

And then we came back to the hotel here. This is the last day in Philadelphia, in a few hours we're off to Hartford, Connecticut. I'll talk to you when we get there.

On the TV as I'm recording this is an ad for "Floyd Cramer - The All-Time Favorites", and one of the songs is "The Old Rugged Cross", which is referenced in "Jesus Thinks You're A Jerk". I thought I'd best record that for posterity.

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