Ultravox at the Orpheum Theatre, Friday, March 30.

Ultravox emerged in 1977 as another of the fledgling bands produced by Brian Eno. Just as they were at the vanguard of commercial success, guiding light and lead singer John Foxx departed the band for a solo career. Foxx was replaced by Midge Ure, whose association with the embryonic New Romantic movement drastically shifted Ultravox's direction away from art rock and toward electronic dance music. The band's post-Foxx albums, while interesting enough, provided no indication as to how they would sound live.

If Ultravox's new album Quarter was any indication, the show would be rather dull, but disaster was averted by the inclusion of songs from the three most recent albums. It appeared, however, that Ultravox had replaced boredom with mechanical renditions of the tunes, with little or no rapport between the band and the audience. Only Billy Currie on keyboards and violin appeared to be having any fun. With simple gymnastics and animated facial expressions he conveyed the impression that the music was important to him.

For me, the turning point in the concert fell midway through "Mr. X," a song from the 1981 album, Foxx's leaving greatly affected the band, and the song can be considered a tribute or perhaps a parody of him. The song's coldly mechanical beat and haunting lyrics bear all the trademarks of Foxx's Melanimic solo album. My fascination with Foxx blurs my perspective of the concert, but the concert changed for the entire theater.

After "Mr. X," the music passed and Midge Ure took center stage for showing up, but he wanted to see us DANCING. With this, they took on their hit of a few years back "Sheepwalk," and then "The Vision," through the song, some roads brought three other hugging drum pads. Someone put his synth and electric drum pads to the drum boys, but the whole band played an extended rhythm break. By now, the entire house and the band were enjoying the music. Only Billy Currie on keyboards and violin appeared to be having any fun. With simple gymnastics and animated facial expressions he conveyed the impression that the music was important to him.

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As you might imagine, it started slowly with church organs and started taking after the first chorus. It's actually not as tackle as I make it sound. The second encore, "The Song (We Go)," started and ended with a capella singing of some nonsense words (do-wah-diddy or some such). At the close, the band stopped and the two background singers continued even as the curtain closed.

The four members of Ultravox were augmented by two male background singer, one who occasionally played keyboards. Although their presence was necessary, it marred the simple symmetry of the stark, muted sound. The entire set was painted a pale grey (including most of the instruments) and all of the band's black leather and clothes. Occasionally, lights, bright "rode" spots pointing out into the audience, and lots of smoke completed the set.

Although Ultravox proved themselves to be competent in concert, it was not easy to escape the impression that the show was more a marketing play than an effort at entertainment. With their new waded down sound and an album destined for hit singles, Ultravox might just help make such concerts commonplace.

Paul Czarnecki