

U2's technically and musically impressive Zoo TV Tour is even better than the real thing

U2

Worcester Centrum.
March 13, 7:30 p.m.
By Chris Roberge
ARTS EDITOR

Tickets for the four New England dates of U2's Zoo TV Tour were certainly hard to come by. Phone lines were overloaded for hours during the days of the tickets' release and, excluding those willing to sacrifice hundreds of dollars for scalped and auctioned seats, admission was available more to the lucky than the devoted. But the fortunate few who were able to get tickets to the show at the Worcester Centrum certainly acted like thankful worshipers of their gods of Bono, the Edge, Adam and Larry, and U2 delivered a performance that was more than worthy of all of the enthusiasm they generated.

The stage for the Zoo TV Tour was possibly the most impressive that I have ever seen. Several East German Trabant automobiles were suspended above the stage's immense

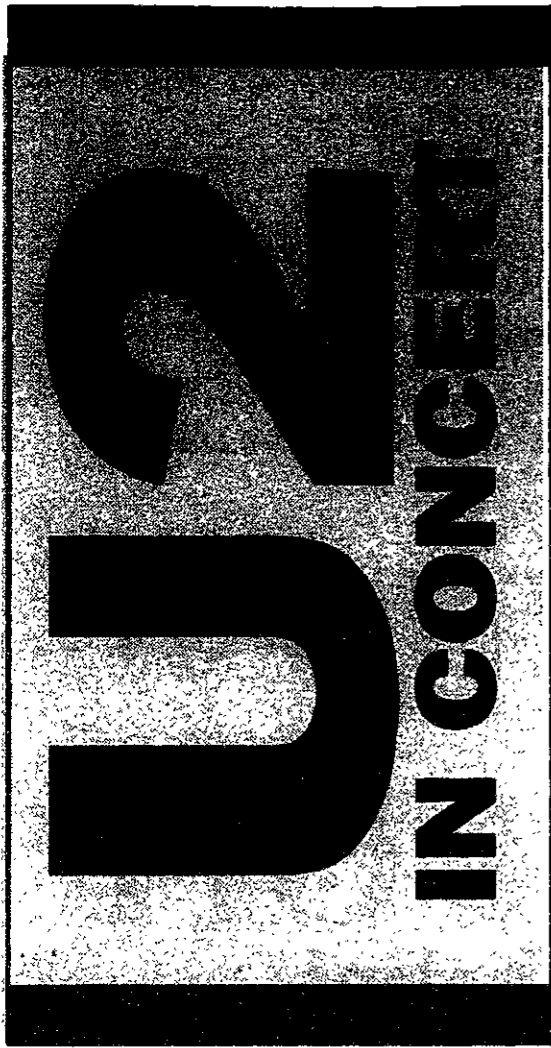
floor, with light pouring onto the band from the cars' front windows and headlights. A narrow walkway extended halfway to the back of the Centrum from the main stage to a much smaller one with a floor that could barely fit all four band members. The light emanating from the cars and from several other sets of lights and lasers was used in very complex and creative ways during most of the songs. Surrounding both stages were dozens of television monitors and four large screens that helped to suggest the omnipresence of television and its images.

These images created some of the more amazing effects of the two hour-long show. After opening with a loud and frantic version of "Zoo Station," the band played an incredible version of "The Fly," accompanied by a constant barrage of words projected on each of the many screens. "Achtung," "KKK," "CBS," "Wear a condom," and other phrases flashed onto the televisions at a rate so fast that they could barely be distinguished. The intense effect created was overwhelming, as

every aspect of the song's production combined into a full frontal assault on the audience's collective senses. As the song came to its end, the message on the screen became "It's your world. You can change it."

Another excellent use of the screens came in a medley performance that began with "Bad." On their latest tour, the band has decided to leave their records prior to *The Unforgettable Fire* untouched, and in a show that relied very heavily on *Achtung Baby*, (ten of the album's twelve tracks were performed at Worcester), the earlier songs such as "Bad" stood apart. The song was played beautifully, with the band bathed in blue light and shown on the monitors with enhanced video effects. "Bad" flowed very smoothly into "All I Want Is You," which was played for less than a minute before exploding into a ferocious version of "Bullet the Blue Sky." The passive images of Bono and the Edge on the screen gave way to a more arresting one of a cross

U2, Page 13



The Edge, Larry Mullen Jr., Bono, and Adam Clayton of U2.

Providence fans believe U2 has changed without selling out

U2

Providence Civic Center.
March 15, 7:30 p.m.
By John Ward

It must be hard to be U2. What's a formerly "alternative" band to do once they have more fans than the Kennedy family, more election-year press coverage than Jesse Jackson, and more money than God? What happens when an anti-establishment group is embraced by the establishment? How do you carry on five years after you cough up your masterpiece? What can you do, except sing in a rock and roll band?

I was sitting in the McDonald's on Fountain Street in Providence mulling over these questions and trying to come up with the answers without having to pay attention to the show, when I noticed one of those U2 zealots sitting directly in front of me. She was decked out in a black sweatshirt upon which was written — in silver and gold glitter pen, naturally — "Achtung Baby," "Tryin' to throw your arms around the world," "Even better than the real thing," and other U2 slogans. As a veteran of two Rod Stewart tours, this apparition didn't particularly affect me, except for one harrowing fact: this woman was old enough to be the mother of any band member. With her was a younger woman (Daughter? Niece? Therapist? Lover? Can we speculate without any legal troubles?) wearing the white version of the same homemade sweatshirt.

From there, it was on to the Fountain Street Bar and Grille. Approximately two

hours before the show, the place was filled beyond capacity. A solitary bartender had her hands full meeting the demand for all the Amstels and Bud Lights being ordered by the fashionably-dressed, health-conscious patrons, most of whom appeared to have a ticket to the show. Unwilling to strike up a conversation, I resolved to try my luck at the Red Brick Tavern down the block.

Things were different there. At least this place had Old Milwaukee on tap, and sold 16-ounce drafts for a buck. This was closer to a traditional (i.e., pre-*Unforgettable Fire*) U2 crowd. I asked two patrons who claimed to have seen the group on its last three tours if they didn't think U2 had sold out somewhat. "Oh no, not really," a blond in her mid-twenties calling herself Kelly replied, "no one's the same after twelve years, though; look at the Stones."

My final pre-concert stop was Back Street Adult Video and Magazines on Mathewson Street. I talked to the man behind the counter, who didn't want to identify himself, and asked if business picked up during the concert weekends.

"No — we might get some hang-arounders, but business is down; this year is bad. When Metallica was here we were a little busier. We do a pretty good business when the URI or Providence College basketball teams play home games, or when the Civic Center hosts the high-school basketball championships [!], but other than that downtown's dead."

Thoroughly depressed, I headed for the

show. After waiting in line for what seemed to be an interminable period (all 15,000 of us were made to enter through exactly three doors), I entered the Providence Civic Center. Both Amnesty International and Greenpeace had booths where the caring rock-and-roller could collect information or make a donation to save the abalone or the latest chic political prisoner. As usual, concessionaries hawked T-shirts, lapel buttons, sweats, hats, and programs. I noted with great interest that T-shirts sold for \$23 each, about \$3 more than I am accustomed to at events of this magnitude. Is this the price we pay for a heightened political consciousness?

I entered the arena and was ushered to my seat — a couple of rows up from the floor. On stage were the Pixies, a Boston-area alternative band ("college" for those whose sensibilities are offended by "alternative"). Playing with either an unfamiliar sound system or an incompetent crew member behind the sound board, they ran through a forty-five minute set of originals and covers. A small group of fans and a smattering of applause kept the group going, but the majority of concert-goers were indifferent. About halfway through an eleven-minute version of "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida," I left to get a hot dog, and didn't return until U2 took the stage.

A little after nine o'clock, the Irish quartet lit into "Zoo Station," one of eight numbers from *Achtung Baby* the group would play. Flanking the group on stage were video monitors which flashed messages to the crowd: "Everything you know is wrong," "Death is

inevitable," and "Drugs are good." In contrast to past tours, lead singer Paul "Bono" Hewson remained mostly silent between numbers, tersely expressing gratitude to the fans for "all the trouble you went through to get tickets," and vowing that "it won't be another five years before we go back on the road," a promise which was met with a collective roar from the crowd.

"How long / How long must we sing this song?" asks "Sunday Bloody Sunday," the first true anthem U2 released. Judging from this most recent tour, the answer to the question is "no longer." That song, along with every other song recorded before *The Unforgettable Fire*, has been conspicuously absent from the set list since the tour began. The primary reason may be to stress the new stuff rather than rehash the old, but it leaves many with the impression that U2 is purposefully avoiding its more political past. Is it hard to sing about the downtrodden while on a tour that will probably make \$100 million?

If one can forget what U2 perhaps once stood for and view them simply as a rock and roll band, the concert was a smash success. To be sure there were many highs: an acoustic version of "Angel of Harlem" which may be even better than the *Rattle and Hum* track, an inspiring sing-along on the chorus of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," and a terrific run-through of "Desire" to begin the encore. Despite some grouching about the lack of "oldies," most fans left excited to have seen a band at the peak of its concert prowess.