

## Aerosmith in Athens: Pylon-shaking Icons Still got Swagger

Perri Pagonis

[perripagonis@yahoo.com](mailto:perripagonis@yahoo.com)

Aerosmith. What can be written about them that hasn't already been written? What can be said that hasn't been heard a thousand times? They are, hands down, the quintessential, inimitable, top-of-the-slagheap American rock band. Who else even comes close to their songwriting skills, award-winning albums and breathtaking live performances? Nobody. To a certain generation of people, namely the children of the 70s, they were the embodiment of decadent, rock star glam and over-the-top lifestyle; the jewel-encrusted icons of pure, absolute self-indulgence. Their records thrilled the youth of an entire nation; almost every high school parking lot in America around the time of the Jimmy Carter administration jammed-out to their *Get Your Wings*, *Toys in the Attic*, and *Rocks* albums. Sex practically leaked from out of the speaker cones of dad's station wagon.

Aerosmith was everything to the fruit gum-chewing, but still emotionally jaded teendom of the times- their greatness in the mid-70s was unparalleled. But just as the flame that shines twice as bright lasts half as long, the inevitable crash came down the road. They believed themselves to be fireproof- hubris, egoism and vanity brought the band to near total collapse by the close of the decade. A black hole period followed- the guitarists quit, lame solo records were released, and all members became pretty much walking-dead, drugged-out, zombified weirdoes.

Sometimes by mere threads, they managed to hold on to a respect, loyalty and care for one another that nearly surpassed the human capacity for endurance. Incalculable amounts of drugs and alcohol, pharmaceutical addictions, gained and lost fortunes, legal hell, personnel absences that lasted years, spats, feuds, difficulties and fierce jealousies with wives and girlfriends could not, in the end, nail the final stake through the band's heart.

But Aerosmith, possibly the most indestructible rock band in history (all original members still above ground) step-by-step, resurrected itself. They all cleaned-up, did the rehab-thing, got new producers and songwriting assistance, and went on the road to prove they still had the right stuff to rock with best the world could offer. They virtually created the power-ballad song format, and streamlined their early hard rock sound to a more radio-friendly pop-rock style which put them all over the airplay charts in the late 80s, 90s and 00s. Now, in 2010, thirty-seven years after their first album release, their fan club demographic includes the tag-end of the Baby-Boomers straight through to the I-pad Generation teeny boppers.

It isn't simply that they are all consummate musicians, as any decent band tends to have a couple of guys who know what they're doing and have dazzling chops. Nor is it that they have a wham-bam light show, world-class equipment, professional sound reinforcement and all the trappings that go with rock royalty on the road. What they have, besides their collective musical genius, is a truly great

mutual story; a story that mirrors almost any nuclear family that has had profound difficulties with its members. Aerosmith's tale is as debauched as anything from the imaginations of Paolo Pasolini or Ramses II.

Every family has its history of children leaving the nest, infidelities, sickness, accomplishments, tragedies, titanic victories and bone-crushing defeats. Aerosmith, and especially their outspoken front man Steve Tyler, have lived out their analogous, quasi-familial tale for us on radio, television and print over more than thirty-five years. Who among us doesn't know of their meteoric rise to greatness and cataclysmic fall? Is there anyone who doesn't know of their almost metaphysical level of drug abuse and eventual rehabilitation? Is there one teenager in America who doesn't know that old squid-lips Steve is the pop of Liv Tyler, one of the most talented, sought-after and tastiest actresses in Hollywood? Can anybody you know, I mean anybody, not sing along with the choruses of such songs as "*Walk this Way*," "*Back in the Saddle*," or "*Dream On*"?

Their innate greatness lies in the fact that when we see Aerosmith, we see that part of ourselves that we all secretly crave to be: magnetic, strong, almost superhero-level survivors that have clawed their way to the top- masters of their craft who have matured to the point where they simply could sit on their laurels, demand acclaim and say "boo" to the world, but choose to give a blistering, tooth, fang and nail, play-for-your-life performance every time they set foot on a stage.

Their current Cocked, Locked, Ready to Rock tour came to Karaiskaki stadium in Athens on June 20<sup>th</sup>. It marked their first appearance ever in Greece and the mostly 35-45 age crowd gobbled their show up like ravenous insects devour a fallen Oreos cookie on the sidewalk. Aerosmith joins the rank of only a few bands in history, a la Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, who don't need to support a current album or radio single to have a successful concert tour. Their last musical release came in 2004, with the blues-cover CD, *Honkin' on Bobo*. Character, brute-personality and playing-reputation can still bring thousands of die hard rock fans to their shows without new ear-candy or FM offerings to tempt them in.

Their stage was minimal by arena rock standards. Cluster lights on rotator stands provided some nice optical distractions but that was about it as far as special effects were concerned. The band, as per usual, relied on their chops, energy and delivery to hold the crowd's attention. And then, with the skill of optic-nerve surgeons, they drove the show's attendees into clean delirium.

Steve Tyler, gypsy-fashion fop of the 70s, came out wearing a massive fedora, sleeveless T-shirt, jeans and sneakers. Guitarist Joe Perry, always the unflappable rock star, sauntered to the stage wearing a silver lame long-rider's coat and black gaucho pants. They teetered on the edge of the proscenium stage's catwalk extension and roared through numbers like "Eat the Rich," "Draw the Line," and "Love in an Elevator."

They are remarkably impressive for guys in their early sixties. Steve still kicks Kung-fu style on the stages hardboards, Joe still rams his guitar's neck into the floor to get feedback-echo effects, and drummer Joey Kramer plays thrilling drum solos with his fists. Brad Whitford, plays chunky chords and textural background chiming with the occasional jaw-dropping lead, and Tom Hamilton, one of the most

underrated bassists in rock history, keeps everything concrete solid, without his foundational notes ever becoming staid or merely mechanical.

As we filed out of the stadium that night, people were humming tunes to themselves, smiling broadly and many had the beatific glow of those who have been to the top of the spiritual mountain to seek purification, and received what they had sought, in spades. Joe Perry promised the crowd that Aerosmith would return to Athens again to play. I strongly recommend that you see them if you have the chance; spend some time with them; you won't be sorry. This, ladies and gentlemen, is what a rock and roll band is all about. They sing about the human condition with power, passion and fury that can simultaneously intimidate a chain gang, and still bring tears of joy from the women. If they didn't exist, we'd have to invent them.