

October 7, 2008

Hi guys-

Here's the R.E.M. review. They seem to be nice guys.

Talk soon, yr pal, P

R.E.M. & Company at Kallimarmaro Stadium

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Just as the Emo music and fashion trend has morphed into a trendier, clean-edged, more peroxidized version of itself in recent months, so has the alternative music crowd of this and the last generation turned into a more couture culture. The untold thousands of mostly age 25 and above attendees at Sunday's R.E.M. Show have traded in their worn thin Counting Crows T-shirts and shredded Levi's for Dolce Gabbana and Diesel wear. Many young couples had their toddling kids with them. The kids had really nice clothes too.

MTV Greece launched on September 1, 2008 and have had lots of events and shows all over town the last month featuring local djs and bands. Sunday's show featuring C: real, Gabriella Cilmi, Kaiser Chiefs and alternative rock icons R.E.M. Was the big enchilada of their self-welcoming hospitality treats to us locals. Alternative rock is and always has been a tricky animal. When I was much younger I'd talk to kids at record stores and ask them exactly what is alternative rock an alternative to? They never knew. I finally came to the subjective conclusion that it meant an alternative choice to omnipresent classic rock bands like Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and The Who, which is kind of ironic as one of the real highlights of the show was 16-year-old Gabriella Cilmi singing a ball-busting version of Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love."

The whole shebang was a real event for Athens. Big name bands playing a free show in the city center doesn't happen very often. Also, in my opinion, local band C: real stole the show. The C: reals are a Greek pop-rock band that has a lot going for themselves. Their songs are smart and radio-friendly. Their keyboard player looks like a hybrid of Duran Duran's Nick Rhodes and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster. The guitarists complement each other nicely as they've got an older, wiser guy calling the shots and laying down the body of the pieces while the young kid does the more flashy fret work. The bass and drums are solid with touches of melody here and there and their singer, Irini Douka, is a powder-keg of high-visibility incendiary estrogen. You could not take your eyes off of her as she prowled the stage in her black mini and designer shades. Their half hour set was crisp, clean, engaging and sexy. It was a good move by the show's producers to have a Greek band open the show. There was a real sense of Hellenic identity among the crowd when the band sang and addressed us in the home language.

Gabriella Cilmi followed the C: reals after their set. Her songs started slowly, showcasing some of the more moody pieces off of her debut CD, *Lessons to be Learned*. Her set gradually gained momentum and the final song, a cover of Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love," was an unexpected thunderbolt of energy that blindsided the crowd with its pure kinetic mass and acceleration. The clever and observant Athens News reader will remember my review article of a few weeks ago when I told you guys that Ms. Cilmi's CD appeared to have several musical influences, including Led Zeppelin. So there you have it. Alternative rock has finally come full circle: a girl who could be Michael Stipe's grand-daughter opened for the ultimate,

all-time alternative band R.E.M. And played a classic rock, Jimmy Page song. You knew it would happen one day. It happened last Sunday.

The Kaiser Chiefs followed with a fast, fun, electric set that had the crowd on its feet the entire time they were on stage. Unfortunately, they only played about 30 minutes. They showcased their MTV hits "Never Miss a Beat," "Ruby," and "Every day I Love You Less and Less." MTV vjs did lots of mindless blah-blah and self-appreciative pimping of their new station between sets and after a short wait, R.E.M. Took the stage.

The 6-man performing stage band look a bit grizzled and road worn from years of touring, but they also look like it's been worth it. They opened with the song "Living Well is the Best Revenge," and played with the the confidence and expertise that comes with having played with the same good friends for many years. Front man Michael Stipe takes on various personas during their 90 minute set: at times he's cool and sauntering like Bryan Ferry, at times disjointed and erratic like David Bowie during his *Man who Sold the World*, Lindsay Kemp period, and at times punky and disconnected like early Stiv Bators.

Bassist Mike Mills and guitarist Peter Buck haven't lost their chops or passion for playing in the last twenty-some years of their collaboration. Their electric and acoustic performances were tight, round and seamless on every piece they presented to us. Highlights of their set included "Losing my Religion," "The One I Love," "Electrolyte," and "Ignore Land."

The entire show was an indirect reflection of the last twenty years of contemporary musical development and its current potential. C: real showed us what could happen if Greek bands were given a chance to play fo a broader, European and worldwide television audience. Kaiser Chiefs gave us a fine, hot set of alternative rock influenced, post-modern rock. Gabriell Cilmi gave us a taste of the classic past and the post-contemporary future and R.E.M., the heavyweight champion of alternative rock, appeared to welcome all those who wish to follow in their footsteps.

All in all it was a good day for local and international music, a good day for Greece, and a really good day to be alive and wearing a nice pair of jeans.