



LOVE IS IN THE AIR

JOSE GONZALEZ

Saturday, February 14, 2009

Beck's Music Box

The air was warm and sticky with humidity on Saturday evening, as singles and couples made their way to Beck's Music Box for a Valentine's date with José González. Festival patrons lapped up the opening night atmosphere of Beck's Music Box, curiously wandering around the venue to note if any changes had been made since last year's season. Only 15 minutes after gates had opened, the stadium seating was taken, the plush couches full of bodies, and the standing areas at capacity.

As the audience wished unsuccessfully for a breeze to begin blowing, the lights were dimmed and a smoke machine activated, and lone figure, **José González** walked onto the stage. Sitting between two empty seats, armed only with his guitar, González began his trademark strumming, launching into *Deadweight On Velvet*. Two songs in, he was joined by a woman equipped with a melodica and a drummer, with a pair of bongos already on stage awaiting his arrival.

As police sirens called out to the sleeping city, the trio began the ethereal *In Our Nature*, framed by the lights of empty office buildings. The deep, luscious sounds of *How Low* were next, demonstrating the yet unmatched, organic tones that resonate in González's voice.

González's touring musicians came into their own on *Time To Send Someone Away*, creating beautiful three part vocal harmonies, as the tapping of a cowbell emulated night time insect noises. *Lovestain* induced a sea of rhythmic claps, with the musicians bathed in a pool of red light. Singles would have appreciated the anti-Valentine's sentiment in the lyrics, 'you left a lovestain on my heart / and you left a bloodstain on the ground / but blood comes off easily'.

With small maracas in hand, the trio then began *Remain*, but it was the next song, *Down The Line* that had feet tapping and heads bobbing. As his vigorous strumming slowed,

González's call of 'don't let the darkness eat you up' echoed into nothingness. For the first time, González spoke directly to audience, sharing that the next song, *Broken Arrows*, was one about 'summer love; love that feels awkward when you get back to normal after summer', leaving the numerous summer lovers in crowd chuckling.

Cycling Trivialities was next up, with González's perfectly-tuned voice accompanied by light percussion and more beautiful three part vocal harmonies.

After playing one of his better known tracks – Massive Attack's *Teardrop* – González stood, thanked the crowd and left the stage. The short set guaranteed an encore and patrons wasted no time, calling for González to play *Heartbeats* as soon as he stepped foot back on stage.

González didn't deliver immediately, playing a solo instrumental first, then playing a cover of The Knife's *Heartbeats*. Even from the very back of the venue, the crowd's whispering of lyrics could be heard, creating a soft echo for singer's own vocal melody. With the audience's appetite for *Heartbeats* quashed, another cover was next on the cards – Bronski Beat's *Small Town Boy*. It seemed out of place though that the most upbeat and lively song of the set was the second last, and a cover to boot.

To seal his anti-Valentine's sentiment, González wrapped up the encore with *Hand On Your Heart*, but the couples in the crowd didn't seem to mind, with most men keeping their arms in small of their loved one's backs.

Though he chose to let his songs speak for themselves and only sporadically thanked the crowd after their rapturous applause, González came across as an honest and genuine individual, humbled by his music's wide appeal.

EMMA BERGMEIER



Jose Gonzalez (Photo by Emma Bergmeier)