

SONIC YOUTH

Shanghai Concert Hall

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Review: Anne Linnee

In the last couple of years I have seen some interesting concerts in Shanghai. Rolling Stones, Black Eyed Peas, the Roots. All bands I like, not bands I love. I think when you live someplace that does not get many concerts any concert becomes event and you pay to see bands you may not otherwise see (this might explain why I went to Enrique Iglesias in Dubai...). Here in Shanghai the tickets are almost always overpriced and the audience is always foreigners (and maybe some Chinese girlfriends). I have fun because I have fun friends not because they are amazing shows.

Tonight Sonic Youth were in Shanghai. When the e-mail went around six weeks ago asking who wanted to go I said sure, not processing the 580 RMB (nearly \$75) ticket price that I agreed to. (Side note: I thought I was buying a ticket to go see Social Distortion who I am a much bigger fan of). When my friend gave me the tickets this weekend I realized we had front row seats and that the show was at a place similar to Northrup in Minneapolis. I was worried that this meant they were having trouble selling tickets.

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We walked into the theatre and I was dumb-founded to see a) that the show appeared to be sold out and b) that 90% of the audience was Chinese. They were all sitting very politely and looked like they were all set for a classical piano recital; not that they were old, everyone was definitely under 25 (except me, of course!). This then lead to me to assume that SY must have agreed to give all the unsold tickets to one of the area music schools or universities. My friends and I spent the 20 minutes or so before the show discussing whether any of them could possibly know who Sonic Youth is/was. (Note: for those of you that don't know SY they are a rock (some would say punk) band that has been around for 25 years and has a huge cult following in the US, but not the most mainstream band around).

Imagine my surprise when the instant the show started all of the Chinese kids rushed the stage and appeared to be FANATICAL Sonic Youth fans. Remember the footage when the Beatles first came to the US? That, but mostly nerdy Chinese college boys. As they surged forward the overly effective Chinese security sprung into action and literally held the line. Now, as I mentioned our seats were in the front row and I was in the aisle seat so there were all these Chinese kids trying to get past the security and freaking out right next to me. At the end of the first song one of the band members told the security guards to let the kids up front, which he did not. I

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am not sure what the aim of the crowd control was, whether it was to "protect" the old laowai (foreigners) in the front row or in true Chinese fashion, to control the people. I'll never know because at this point my friend (being true to the spirit of rock and roll) offered to switch spots (basically giving her ticket) to the most spastic kid, well this opened the flood gates that the security could not stop. The concert was great in spirit (if not acoustics), the audience seemed to know all the songs and all the words (I don't even know the words and English is my native language). They went especially nuts for anything that was especially loud and fast.

I don't know if it was my age or my height or being a laowai, but after an hour of trying to hang with kids in the mosh pit that had sprung up basically at my seat, I gave up and conceded my seat to an extra-nerdy kid who brought a massive backpack full of text books (I wish I was kidding) and slinked off to the side to watch the crowd (Don't feel too bad for me, I was still front row, leaning on the stage, just not front row-center anymore). I have to admit that watching the crowd was even more fun...

After the concert I started chatting with the two girls standing closest to me (English names: Lisa and Lilo (from the "Fifth Element")). According to them Sonic Youth is HUGELY popular in China and recognized as one of the most original punk bands and that

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"everyone knows who they are". Lisa & Lilo were 24 and both accountants. Who knew?

SY played for over two hours, two encores and said this was the best crowd they had played in years. I believe them. It must be pretty awesome to be Kim Gordon and be 53 years old and have 2000 kids from China going nuts for you.

Long live rock and roll.