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Tool Take Radio City

Rockers salute the Ramones during epic set

By Robin A. Rothman
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synchronization to the music as Tool's does, it makes spontaneity a mighty difficult task to pull off. In the midst of a national arena tour that's taking them from Bakersfield to Buffalo and Ottawa to Illinois, Tool's pit stop at the significantly smaller yet acoustically superior Radio City Music Hall Tuesday may have shelved opening act Tomahawk, but it included an unexpected addition.

The set began, as almost all of them do, with the Top Ten single "Sober," accompanied by the award-winning dark and disturbing stop-motion animation music video, directed by guitarist Adam Jones. But where the band would normally play "40" or simply head straight into another current standard "The Grudge," the opening track of their latest album *Lateralus*, a you-had-to-be-there moment struck.

"This song goes out to," vocalist and songwriter Maynard James Keenan began slowly. And then he paused. And he paused still. And he finally finished, "Joey and Dee Dee." The band jumped into an extremely heavy cover of the Ramones' "Commando," baffling some fans and driving others into an approving fit of screams.

As "The Grudge" began, the thick curtain behind the band dropped to the stage, revealing a tremendous fifty-six-by-thirty-five-foot version of "InterBeing," an elaborate, colorful piece by Alex Grey, the artist responsible for the band's album art among other things. Tool have a knack, despite Keenan's day-glo stripes and Speedo get-up or his thrashing and flailing, to draw attention away from their physical presence on stage. There is often so much going on simultaneously that the experience is almost reduced to constant decisions about where to look. The fact that they've almost entirely revamped the video from last tour only adds to the dilemma. Tool are one of the few bands for which a back row ticket can be a blessing.

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In the two-hour concert, Tool otherwise stuck to their general schedule, playing "Stinkfist," an extended version of "Schizm" (complete with extended video footage), "The Patient," "Aenima," "Disposition," "Reflection." The band was joined during the drum solo-esque tribal psychmetal jam "Triad" by additional musicians, introduced by Keenan as Joe Paul Slavey on rototoms and Vince De Franco, the band's sound engineer, on keyboards.

What set this show apart though, aside from the nod to New York's original punks, was not the content, but the quality of the show. Beginning with the first clipped beats of "Sober" from Jason Chancellor's bass and ending with the last gut-wrenching pound of Danny Carey's tortured kick drum on the show-closing "Lateralus," a picture of the impact of the powerful and pristine sound might resemble that classic scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Faces awestruck and melting off the bone, light shooting through the guts of all onlookers -- puncturing them yet connecting them at the same time.

Neither cavernous like an arena nor tinny like a club, Radio City withstood Tool's warning that they would "usurp another landmark," as they challenge on their Web site. The venue embraced the sonic assault and lobbed it back beautifully.

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