

Mayday Parade escapes sophomore jinx

By MIKE CHAIKEN
EDITIONS EDITOR

The fortune of any rock band can rise and fall upon that dreaded second album.

The list of bands that exploded onto the scene with their debut and flopped with their second album is just too populated to detail here.

Mayday Parade, which comes to Hartford's Webster Theater on Friday, Feb. 5, is touring behind its major label debut—and its sophomore effort overall—"Anywhere but Here."

Mayday Parade's singer/ keyboardist Derek Sanders said it was scary heading into the studio for the follow-up to their popular first album, "A Lesson In Romantics" from 2007.

"None of us have been in a band long enough to do two albums, so we all were definitely nervous and excited," said Derek, who is joined in Mayday Parade by bassist Jeremy Lezno, guitarists Alex Garcia and Brooks Betts and drummer Jake Bundrick.

But rather than dwell on its fears about that sophomore jinx, Derek said the band just decided to pick its best songs and do the best it could when it recorded. Their philosophy became, "What happens happens," said Derek.

For "Anywhere but Here," Mayday Parade definitely brought in a heavy hitter to boost its efforts the

second go-around. They teamed up with producer David Bendeth, who has worked with such hot groups as Paramore and Underoath.

"David is a great guy," said Derek.

Initially, Derek said, the band was nervous about working with a big time producer and how he would treat the guys. But their worries were unfounded.

"He was really great," said Derek. "He was very helpful and easy to work with." He would show the band how to improve the structures of their songs and how things should be recorded. Derek said the band and Bendeth had few artistic differences in the studio. "It was a collaboration. It flowed very well."

Being on a major label for their second album afforded the band more time in the recording studio, explained Derek. This gave them freedom to try different musical textures, said Derek.

Derek said when he was in other bands, when they got a chance to record, they paid for it themselves. So the bands would get into the studio and get out as quickly as possible so they didn't ring up some really high bills.

For "Anywhere but Here," the label gave Mayday Parade two months in the studio to record. This gave them time to listen to



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Mayday Parade is coming to Hartford's Webster Theater on Friday, Feb. 5.

songs again and again and "to make them perfect," said Derek. It also gave them time to experiment.

Asked what inspires the songwriting for Mayday Parade, Derek said the band tends to write about how they are feeling at the time they begin composing. A lot of songs for "Anywhere but Here" were written while the band was on the road. Derek said the songs focus on how life on the road affects relationships with girlfriends, friends, and

family.

Even though "Anywhere but Here" was released just last year, Derek said the band has been taking baby steps toward preparing for its third release. He has been fiddling around with some song ideas as he has been sitting on the bus heading out to the next gig. "When it comes time for next album I want to be prepared," he said.

As for the Take Action tour with headliners, We

The Kings, "It's great," said Derek. He said Mayday Parade has toured with We The Kings and fellow Take Action band, There For Tomorrow, previously. So now they're all good friends heading out on to the road.

For the rest of 2010, Derek said Mayday Parade plans to stay on the road "as much as possible." There might be a slight break on the horizon. But after that, all signs point to a stint on the Warped Tour this summer, said Derek.

Beyond that, Derek said, who knows.

Mayday Parade and the Take Action Tour (with We The Kings, There for Tomorrow, A Rocket to the Moon, and Call the Cops) come to Hartford's Webster Theater on Friday, Feb. 5. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. For more information, go to MaydayParade.com or WebsterTheater.com

Comments? Email mchaiiken@BristolObserver.com

Our Reviews

'The Lion King' entertains and enchants the audience

By MIKE CHAIKEN
EDITIONS EDITOR

Although "The Lion King" may be old hat for some stage musical fans, as evidenced by last Friday's production at The Bushnell in Hartford, the show still carries a pretty sizeable entertainment wallop.

How big a wallop?

At the opening night performance, I was surrounded by small children and their parents. Prior to the show, the children were already fidgeting and their attention span seemed to be at their limit. And parents were noticeably distracted by keeping their children distracted before curtain rose, promising that the show would be going any moment.

But once the lights went down, and as an amazing parade of jungle

beasts depicted by actors and intricate puppets made its way down the aisle, the audience members – young and old— were enchanted. Even though "The Lion King" is three hours long (the show began at 8 p.m. and I didn't get out till 11 p.m.), the children settled down quickly and there wasn't a peep from them except to laugh at the proceedings on-stage and to sing along with the music.

The humor built into "The Lion King" was a key to the show's success for children—and it held the attention of the adults as well. After all, the story itself is pretty serious stuff. A king is killed by his jealous brother, and the brother convinces the king's son that he killed his father, forcing the son to head into exile on his own. Murder isn't usually the stuff of children's tales (although it is a common enough element in many of the world's

mythologies).

The creators of "The Lion King" offered up plenty of light moments to temper the heavy ones.

Tony Freeman, who plays King Mufasa's trusted advisor Zazu, is delightful. He brightened the stage each time his jungle bird appeared on stage. And at every moment of his performance, it was clear he was having fun.

Tyler Murree as the meerkat Timon also was full of wisecracks—with a nod to the classic comedians of the Borscht Belt, which was instantly recognizable to grandparents in the audience.

And Ben Lipitz as Pumbaa also was a hoot as a perpetually flatulent, yet loveable warthog.

Even the primary dramatic characters made sure they did not tackle their roles with too heavy a hand. Dionne Randolph as the father/ King Mufasa

held a regal air, almost like a young James Earl Jones. But Randolph exhibited the paternal tenderness in Mufasa's heart as he dealt with his son Simba. Andre Jackson as the adult Simba was playful when he needed to be. But, with shades of Hamlet, he was clearly conflicted when he confronted his own desires and fears. Brent Harris played his villain Scar with broad strokes, he was easy enough to boo and hiss, but even he maintained a light-hand as he depicted the source of all of his Simba's woes.

While the story and performances of the actors kept everyone enchanted, the costumes and puppetry were fabulous enough to create a sense of wonder as the story unfolded. The production of Julia Taymor transported this Disney tale, which could have been merely cute and schmaltzy, to something cutting edge

and even at times avant garde. The use of puppetry in this show is truly visionary. She managed to adapt a number of traditional art forms from Africa, Asia and more and make them new and give them the heft of great art.

The choreography of Garth Fagan also elevates "The Lion King" beyond a mere adaptation of a Disney movie. It drew from the same creative well as visionary modern dance troupes such as Momix. On paper, dancing trees and saw grass sounds like a poor imitation of, say, "The Nutcracker." But Fagan, and the dancers in the road production, makes it work. Again, he finds the humor in what he is doing to keep the young members of the audience entertained.

Of course, this is a musical. So how was the music by composer Elton John and lyricist Tim Rice? If you remember the movie

version of the music, you'll be surprised. Yes, you will recognize the melodies. But for the stage musical, the arrangements have been given more gravitas. They have been transformed from mere pop songs to music that seems as if has long been part of the African folk tradition.

When the curtain set and the lights went back up, I didn't see a disappointed look on a single face in the audience in Hartford. And rather than the typical mad rush to leave the theater, many of the children kept their parents lingering, probably hoping for a little bit more of Simba, Mufasa and the clan.

I give "The Lion King" 3 1/2 stars out of 4.

"The Lion King" continues at The Bushnell, 166 Capitol Ave., Hartford through Feb. 14. For tickets, go to Bushnell.org