

Our Reviews

# Rob Thomas is his own best advertisement

By MIKE CHAIKEN  
EDITIONS EDITOR

I bought the new Rob Thomas album, "Cradlesong." I also picked up "Mad Season" by his group Matchbox 20. **★★★★ Concert**

And I can thank last Tuesday night's performance by Thomas at the Mohegan Sun for that impulse purchase.

A rock concert, ultimately, is a promotional tool used by artists. Musicians release albums, they want to sell albums, so they go on tour to get people to hear their new music, so they want to buy their new albums.

And Rob Thomas did just that.

Billed as an intimate performance to benefit his charity, Sidewalk Angels Foundation, the Sun gig was a simple affair. Thomas left behind his full touring band and just stepped out onto a bare stage accompanied only by guitarist/pianist Matt Beck and guitarist Frankie Romano. He stripped his arrangements to the barebones, putting the focus on the words and



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**Rob Thomas sings during his headlining performance at the Mohegan Sun Arena last Tuesday.**

melodies for the next two-plus hours.

Along the way, reminiscent of TV shows like "Unplugged" and "Storytellers," Thomas gave the near sell out crowd in the Arena an insight into his inspirations and history of the songs.

Now, I have to admit, heading into the show at the Sun, I wasn't a huge fan of Rob Thomas. I definitely

wasn't like the many women at the show, who danced and swayed and hung on every one of Thomas's words.

I knew Rob Thomas's music. I heard it on the radio. I didn't go out of my way to change the station when his tunes came through the speakers.

But except for the first Matchbox 20 record, I had not made a point of adding

Thomas or his band to my list of favorite acts.

To further clarify, I didn't dislike him. He just was the soundtrack for someone else's life.

But hearing him on stage, hearing songs like "Streetcorner Symphony," "This is How a Heart Breaks," "Smooth," "Mockingbird," and "Her Diamonds," as well as Matchbox 20 tracks like

"3AM" and "Bent," I gained a greater appreciation for his songwriting. Thomas and his band managed to craft arrangements that kept to the spirit of the originals but made them more transparent to facilitate better appreciation.

Also, the tales he told gave me a context for the songs, facilitating even deeper appreciation of his work. It was interesting to hear how Matchbox 20's "3AM" was about how he had to deal with his mother's cancer when he was a young child. It was touching to hear how "Her Diamonds" was about how he wanted to help his wife beat a serious illness but he didn't know how.

It also was fun to hear Thomas's self-deprecating commentary on his own personality.

The format of the show also touched the rest of the audience as well. Listening to the conversation around me, audience members also were enraptured by the tales and there were a lot of exclamations around, "I've felt that as well" and "I love that song."

What was nice about the show also was that although it was a benefit for Thomas's charity Sidewalk Angels, except for one

moment in the show where he brought it up and asked audience members to adopt a shelter dog, Thomas was smart enough not to become all preachy. (According to the website for Sidewalk Angels Foundation the organization is "dedicated to providing critically needed funds and support to grassroots groups across the country. It is the primary supporter and sponsor of a number of no-kill animal shelters and animal rescues, reflecting the passion of the foundation's co-founders to fight for the rights and fair treatment of those with no voice. Additionally, the foundation also supports a myriad of other causes, from childhood health and wellness to the fight against homelessness.")

I might have walked into the show at the Mohegan Sun Arena last Tuesday without an opinion on Thomas's musical output through the years. But leaving the arena, he won over at least one more fan.

I give Rob Thomas's Mohegan Sun Arena performance 4 out of 4 stars.

## Movie

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quarters," which was kind of funny. The pre-production for "Mark of the Beast" was the hardest it's been compared to all the other films, at least from my perspective. The timing of it was such that we didn't have a lot of actual manpower around to help out. So a lot of work fell on a few people, which at times was very overwhelming. You learn a lot in situations like that, though.

**Q: What was the mood on the set like as the time progressed?**

**Tom:** Actually everyone fared very well. We shot at a camp retreat in Voluntown. So it was all in one location and for the most part everyone just slept there

and got up and shot. There were good vibes there and I have to thank our executive producers Tim and Chi Kulig for making this all possible.

**Sheri:** This has definitely been the smoothest, most fun shoot we've done. Our crew was awesome. Everyone was just really positive, really upbeat. There were a couple days when we only had a skeleton crew on set, which always makes things tough. But aside from that, everything went really smooth. There was a campfire just about every night and a lot of the guys would hang out there after we'd wrap. Debbie and I would usually retire to the "girls' cabin" and tell ghost stories and hide from the bugs. One night, Debbie, Maggie, Leigh (Radziwon of Southington, the special effects makeup artist for

"Mark of the Beast") and I literally gathered under a blanket and told ghost stories while the guys went swimming in the lake. So much fun. Since a lot of us have worked on so many films together and we're all friends, there's always a good vibe. And because we've known each other for so long, we just have a sense of like, "Okay, I can tell that so-and-so seems a little overwhelmed right now, I'll step up and they can take a break" kind of a thing.

**Q: What are your hopes for the film?**

**Tom:** Well a top ten-film festival would be nice. I think we have a shot this time.

**Sheri:** That people get into it. It'll be interesting to see the reaction given that it's so different from the other films we've done.

**Q: What's next for the film? What's the release date?**

**Tom:** Editing, editing, editing. Maybe next year I'll have something.

**Q: And what's next for your team?**

**Tom:** Well "Bikini Bloodbath Christmas" comes out Oct. 19 on DVD. Please support Connecticut film and buy a copy. It's

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funny and offensive.

**Sheri:** Now that "Mark of the Beast" is finished, we are shifting gears and getting ready to promote that ("Bikini Blood bath Christmas"). There's going to be a premiere in New Haven Oct. 16 ... We're also looking into horror conventions, festivals, things like

that. We're also going to be having a webstore through Shogun Screenprinting (www.shopshogun.com) where we'll be launching some new t shirt designs and some other fun things.

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