

Rhythm and Roots

- by Jenny Platt

Celebrating the connection and diversity of the world's cultures while simultaneously bringing together an eclectic group of performers and raising funds for Children Uniting Nations, this year's Rhythm and Roots concert at the Ford Amphitheatre was a real treat.



Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble

Photo by Laura Mingo

With a line-up including Grammy Award Winner Macy Gray, local dance group Keshet Chaim and hip hop artist MC Lyte, the concert was anything but boring. It began, like any well-attended concert, a few minutes late, but when the voices of The Agape International Choir Ensemble lifted up in harmony, joy and spirit, all was forgiven.

Beautifully dressed in

white and turquoise, this phenomenal group both looked and sounded as though they came from the heavens, and all too soon, their act had ended.

But when the sparkling rhinestone-encrusted microphone stand came out, the audience whispered in anticipation of the night's next performer, diva activist Macy Gray, singing her hit single "I Try." Words cannot express how excited people were to hear this much-loved song live, though I can say there was quite a bit of audience accompaniment. In addition to performing, Macy Gray was also presented with a Children Uniting Nations Angel Award, for her recent efforts to raise money to send a young Palestinian woman to Oxford University.

Following Macy Gray were unique dance performances by American-Israeli contemporary dance company Keshet Chaim and African-American dance company Lula Washington Dance Theatre, who shared a colorful mixture of Israeli, African and Indian choreography, donning magnificent costumes as they gracefully moved across the stage.

Rounding out Act I was crooning heartthrob Harel Skaat, the runner-up on the second season of "A Star is Born," the Israeli version of "American Idol". Though he sang mostly in Hebrew, Skaat captured the ears and hearts of many ladies in the audience, his full voice echoing out in the name of peace and love under the starry night sky.

After an intermission that was indeed long enough for the entire line in the women's bathroom to make it through, Abraham McDonald brought his showmanship to the stage. A large man with an even heftier voice, this solo artist and champion for the arts inspired laughter and awe as he performed runs up and down and all around the musical scale. He and his female back-up singer even belted out about breakfast. But that's clearly another story.

Hip hop star MC Lyte brought down the house with her rhythm, rhyme and positive

energy, followed by encore performances of both dance groups, Harel Skaat and a lively finale which brought back my favorite act of the night, The Agape International Choir Ensemble.

It was past eleven when I finally made my way back to my car, but Rhythm and Roots was worth my sore caboose and Monday morning exhaustion. The performances were fantastic, but best of all, the concert proceeds benefited Southern



Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble

Photo by Laura Mingo



MC Lyte in Rhythm & Roots

Photo by Laura Mingo

California's leading mentorship agency dedicated to working with the often forgotten children of the foster care system, Children Uniting Nations. And to those children who may be reading this, the talent and effort of the performers and all who organized this event proves one thing: you are not forgotten.

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