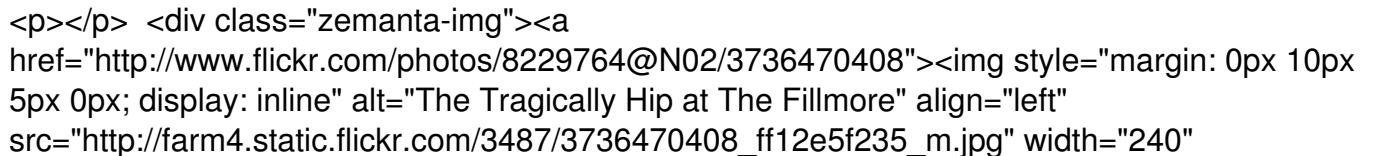


The Tragically Hip: Stellar After All These Years | Allan Besselink

Written by Allan Besselink

Sunday, 01 November 2009 13:02

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/8229764@N02/3736470408>The Tragically Hip at The Fillmore

It all started back in 1983 in Kingston, Canada and after 12 albums and 26 years of playing together, it is readily apparent to me: the Hip have still got it.

It's fair to say that the Tragically Hip are relatively unknown in the US, though they are one of the greatest Canadian bands to grace the planet. In Canada, it's an afterthought that they sell out stadiums and open air venues within hours of tickets going on sale. But the Live Music Capital of the World, Austin, has always had a connection with Das Hips.

I've been fortunate to watch their growth and evolution over the years. They were students at Queen's University when I was doing my undergrad degree there. The early days had them playing on campus at Alfie's and off-campus at places like The Manor. In 1987 they recorded their first EP, and I distinctly remember the talk on campus that the Hip were doing a video for their first single (I think it was Small Town Bringdown) at the Manor, so everyone should show up. They were a good cover band, and the first inklings of their own material were solid. The Hip were the real deal in Kingston. Ahhh I remember those days well.

Moving to Austin in 1990, I got to see them in some very small clubs, something that was unheard-of for them in Canada. Friends used to lament that I was able to see them in a small venue, and they couldn't get tickets to see them anywhere in Canada. I was able to see them at classic venues like Liberty Lunch. One of the most notable was the show at the Lunch in which they were in town to do a live test of upcoming material. Austin has been one of the few US cities that really get the Hip.

And then, I think it was 1994, there was one of many legendary Gord Downie rants. It was the year of the World Cup for soccer. Earlier in the day, legendary Brazilian soccer star Romario had been interviewed on TV. At the beginning of the show, Downie quoted the interview verbatim, with a Latin vocal flair, taking about 5 minutes to do so. Of course, he added in his own elements to accentuate it. And then, he ended with I am Romario. And then the band exploded into their opening song. His rants have always made the shows even more entertaining.

I think I have missed one Hip show in Austin in the 20 years that I have lived here. Suffice it to say, I keep going back because they are one hell of a live band.

Which brings me to the show last week at La Zona Rosa. I think it weighed in at over 3 hours, two sets, an encore, and a crowd that would hang on every word, every chord.

The night was a broad paint stroke of their 26 years of music. I'm not as familiar with their latest album, but they played a lot of gems from all their previous stuff. Gord Downie was on his game again as always. His humor is sublime, sarcastic, patriotic, and deep. You've got to be quick to catch his wit. The band also on their game as always. They did some songs that I don't think I've heard them play live before - Long Time Running being a perfect example. They did a short acoustic mini-set, all seated playing some classics like Flamenco. In all the times I've seen them over the years, I've not seen their unplugged side.

But when they rock wow, they do it so very well. And they have for years. From the moments of seeing them on campus at Queen's in 1984 or 1985 to now this is a tight band with all the original band members remaining.

Highlights for me were, without question, pretty easy to pick out. These are my favorites, in part because of the lyrics:

At The 100th Meridian

get Ry Cooder to sign my eulogy

Bobcaygeon

it was at Bobcaygeon, where I saw the

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constellations, reveal themselves one star at a time

Gift Shop

Screaming from the rooftops, we live to survive our paradoxes

Admittedly, there is a lot of Canadian history woven into the Hip songs. And when you see the people attending a Hip show, the first 4 or 5 standing-room-only rows of people at stage level are almost always Canadians. When a group raised the Canadian flag in front of the stage, he remarked don't let your nationalism get in the way of everyone seeing the stage. So typically Downie.

As a side note I've seen the Hip at a number of different venues, but this got me thinking about the loss of certain aspects of the Austin music scene. Perhaps the best show the Hip played in Austin (in my humble opinion) was at the late, great Liberty Lunch, yet another long-lost club in the Austin music scene. For a moment last night, I thought back to the Lunch, and smiled. Ah, those were the days. And the Hip another stellar performance. Stellar after all these years.

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