

The Heart of Rock-n-Roll Is Still Beating

ROCKBOX

by Greg Forest

It is something of a show business cliché that when you hear the term, “A fast-paced Vegas-style show,” it usually describes an act that isn’t either.

Tack on “fun for the whole family,” and you have the standard pitch of every agent I know of, but it is a cliché rarely lived up to. In Fredericksburg, not even a block off Main Street, the description is not a tired cliché but a dynamic and entertaining reality that you and your friends and family don’t want to miss.

A friend of mine and I went to see what all the hubbub was about regarding the Rockbox Theater. I had been hearing rave reviews from friends and family for some time. I am a big fan of travel web sites and when tripadvisor.com, one of the most popular, labeled The Rockbox as *the* premier Texas tourist attraction (sorry Shamu), I had to check it out.



On Llano Street, just a few feet north of Main, the Rockbox Theater sits on a sizeable portion of the block. Although it doesn’t look like much, much less a theater, once inside you can see what a herculean labor of love and talent went into creating this tribute to my favorite art form, rock and roll.

The theater has been designed around this show specifically and is one of the more comfortable I have been in. It is a pretty large room with a capacity that approaches 400 seats. Handicapped access is easy and there literally is not a bad seat in the house. I was fortunate enough to get a third row center seat and the stage was less than twenty feet away.

The Rockbox is no stranger to technology either. The sound and lighting is top notch. I should know, sound and lighting is one of the services my company has been offering for 25 years and this is one of the best theater designs and sound installations I’ve seen.

Many people have an aversion to rock music because of the sound levels. If it ain’t loud, it ain’t rock. After having blown my ears to smithereens decades ago, hearing these great songs at a decibel level that allows the lyrics and voices to come through was very refreshing. Don’t get me wrong, I certainly wouldn’t describe the environment as “quiet,” but you can enjoy the greatest rock songs ever written at a level that doesn’t pin your ears back.

The audience was filled with rock-n-roll enthusiasts of all ages and types. Although the Rockbox is a popular tourist attraction, I would guess that half the audience was from the region. Of that percentage, I would also guess that most of them were repeat customers. There is a reason for this. The Rockbox troupe changes the show every week! While some variety shows can run years with the same material, the Rockbox keeps the show fresh with new material each week. This is no small task.

OK. So the building, the sound and lighting are all great, what about the music? I’ve been playing professionally since 1969 and, without a doubt, the cast of the Rockbox are musicians of the highest caliber. If talent is a commodity, these folks are wealthy. The band is exceptionally tight with Mark Best on bass and Jacob Longoria on drums kicking as one of the tightest rhythm sections out there. Keyboardist Cass Moore is a virtuoso, covering piano and organ parts with one hand and horn section parts with the other. When you add the great guitarists in the troupe, T.J. Smith and Russ Hearn, you have yourself one rockin’ ensemble.

A great band needs great vocalists too and the Rockbox troupe has great voices to spare. The power and range of the primary vocalists, Linda Moran, Carey Dyer and Wendy Hearn reaches a level that all pro singers aspire to. They have strong voices with incredible ranges and perfect pitch. When they dropped into a short sequeway of music from the golden era of doo-wop, they nailed it with some of the voices soaring over three octaves or more. It takes a special kind of vocalist to cover a low pitched Elvis ballad and then moments later break into an awesome falsetto with, “In the jungle the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight.” This group should be proud of every lick they play and should serve as an example to a younger generation that you don’t have to tune in and drop out to be a rock musician. Tuning up and kicking musical butt serves just fine.

If you noticed that some of the last names of the cast are the same it is because this is not only a labor of love, it is a family affair. These folks have 1800 shows under their belts and have been working stages for their whole lives. After years of touring, they all decided to build something for themselves and their families here in the Hill Country and we are all richer for it. Check the Rockbox website at rockboxtheater.com for showtimes. These folks rock!

