

Sweet, Etheridge show pleases Omaha crowd



Concert review

The pride of the heartland rang through the Orpheum Theater in Omaha Monday night as native Midwesterners Matthew Sweet and Melissa Etheridge rocked the stage.

Although Etheridge was billed as the major act, she was in heavy competition with Nebraska fans from Sweet's home soil. The dynamic duo worked together in an odd sort of way, playing to one of the most diverse crowds in one of the oddest venues for a rock concert.

Plowing at his guitar with the vengeance of a real altered beast, Sweet performed popular hits such as "Devil With the Green Eyes," "Superdeformed" and "Girlfriend." A mannerly Sweet cordially welcomed the audience to listen to him as he narrated a little explanation before each piece.

Even in the formal setting of the Orpheum Theater, the crowd turned ecstatic during "Ugly Truth Rock." Sweet's sound system was a little overbearing and his bassist a little drug out, but his backing guitarist and drummer made up for any loss.

Sounding much better live, Sweet's persona came through with a passion. The intensity of his emotion and sincerity was never more pure.

Following Sweet's performance emerged one of the greatest groundbreaking female rock artists ever. As if set on fire, hundreds of Etheridge fans jumped from their seats, and in the Orpheum this is a monumental event. Born and bred in Kansas, Etheridge proved to be a true performer.

With a sound so unique and gut-wrenching and a style so Tom Pettyish, Etheridge really knew how to please her audience. Her inner strength came out in her vigilant attacks on her

guitar, as she took it down to the ground and pleaded with it on every note.

"Come to My Window" opened the set, with Etheridge under complete control of her environment and emotion. Her performance was full of spontaneity. "Bring Me Some Water" kicked off the action, as Etheridge plunged into the vitality reflected by her fans.

She played a few songs solely to the beat of her hands on the back of a guitar, producing a hauntingly passionate sound.

Etheridge performed a wide variety of hits, many from her most recent release, "Yes I Am," to a crowd of screaming fans of all types. She came off as sly and clever, while maintaining a down-home attitude.

Aside from cajoling the audience with her "shiny blue shirt," Etheridge used that Midwestern kindness with her band in an almost family-style performance. Etheridge and her two guitarists created a pseudo-trap set out of their guitars and surrounded the drummer for an interesting drum solo. They proved to be a band truly greater than the sum of its parts.

Speaking of interesting, the last concert I went to at the Orpheum was Mannheim Steamroller. Now, Chip Davis is a stud and all, but he's not a rock star. So the initial thought of a rock concert at the Orpheum was like having a ballet performance at the Ranch Bowl. However, the diversity of the audience and an excited yet controlled crowd explained the reasoning behind this choice.

From flannel-clad teen-agers to glitzy, formally dressed middle-age women, the crowd spanned all subcultures and ages. There was a teen-age guy in jeans and a T-shirt there with his best friend's mom.

It was quaint but emotionally motivational at the same time. Both Sweet and Etheridge relaxed in their home environment, performing all the way down to their roots.

— Paula Lavigne



Jay Calderon/DN
Melissa Etheridge performed at the Orpheum Theatre in Omaha Monday night. Etheridge, a Kansas native, performed after Lincoln native Matthew Sweet.

Landis adopts dual role as both actor, senator

SPOTLIGHT

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

With a conniving sneer, pointing a finger toward his colleague, Sen. Dave Landis of Lincoln spat out the warning. "I have always relied on my hunches, always. And I have never been wrong."

No, Landis wasn't debating with a fellow senator on the floor of the Legislature. He was on stage at the Studio Theater as Saul, a trendy, cheesy film producer shouting at his client, in Sam Shepard's play "True West."

On an average weekday, Landis spends his daytime hours in business attire debating and proposing legislative bills. When the session ends, Landis sheds the suit and tie for a costume and is ready to perform again, this time on stage.

Aside from serving in the Nebraska Legislature as a representative from the 46th district and acting, Landis teaches at three area colleges, hosts a weekly nostalgic rock radio show and is a father and husband.

Landis leads what would seem to be a life full of contradiction. However, he said it was a simple — even enjoyable — task.

"I find that my stress level is less when I have (this) as a source of rejuvenation," he said. "Although it creates its own tension, it's usually quite a positive image, since it's so remarkably different than how I spend my time (in the Legislature)."

Landis has carried major roles in about 60 plays and musicals, including "M. Butterfly," "Big River," "The Tempest" and "A Midsummer's Night Dream."

"It's so refreshing," he said. "Although acting and politics may not 'compute from the outside,' on

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— Landis

the inside "it creates a nice sort of balance," Landis said.

Landis said his acting interest started in high school where he was a member of the debate team. As a sophomore, he participated in high school plays, where he learned the egalitarianism of acting.

"We were all equal in the eyes of the enterprise," he said, because of the friendships he made with upperclass students. The same equality exists with his work today, he said.

"It's not like other actors say 'He's the senator. Let's keep our mouths closed and not say certain words around him.'"

Landis said young actors either decided to act as a full-time career or they dropped it completely. His decision to take the middle road was a vivid memory.

"I sat in a restaurant next to this building, Dave's restaurant, and I asked myself if I wanted to sell ... this (his acting talents)."

He didn't want to become a professional actor, he said, because it would cheapen the aesthetic value of acting.



William Lauer/DN

State senator and actor Dave Landis wipes weariness from his eyes during the final reading session of the Legislature on Tuesday. Landis' ability to speak in public is balanced between performing on stage and debating on the floor.

While maintaining his acting career, Landis said he took on the family tradition of practicing law. After working as a lawyer and judge, Landis researched for a legislator and said, "I can do that."

From then on, Landis has been making two seemingly uncommon interests, acting and politics, into a harmonic combination.

"I think I want to carry with me an integrated whole — teacher, actor, senator, father, husband," he said. "The whole can be expressed in many ways, but it's not like channels of a television where you go 'click' — politics, 'click' — different person

involved in theater."

He said the two activities actually had a lot in common. Their differences are what keeps Landis on his feet. He said he also used his acting abilities in another part of his life — parenting.

"You can participate as equals, not as just father and child. You can play with their imaginary friend," he said. Last year in the musical "Baby," Landis played the father in a 40-year-old couple, while his son played the father in a 20-year-old couple.

"We were singing a song about fatherhood on stage and saying how weird it was," he laughed. He said his

wife and daughter were actresses as well.

If anything, Landis said, good acting tells the truth.

"You're finding the truth in a certain character and having the guts to summon that truth and making others feel the force of that truth."

He said his many roles in life had never conflicted.

"People don't come up to me and say 'I don't agree with your politics, so I think you're a lousy actor,'" he said.

Landis will be performing in the Nebraska Repertory Theatre's production of "The Cocktail Hour" this summer.