

Karen Telleen-Lawton: Music for All Time Plays On



The sounds of the band Chicago have staying power

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | Published on 04.19.2010

A couple of weeks ago, [Chicago](#) (the band) played at the [Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza](#). When I arrived and began to notice the average age of the attendees, I found that it had grown later than I thought. My impression was not dispelled when the band members came onstage. But when the music began, everyone in the audience was carried back 30-something years to our own best “Saturday In the Park.”

Chicago’s repertoire includes good songs rich with horns, upbeat notes, good lyrics and a great beat. It embodies the zeitgeist not of a particular decade such as the 1970s, but of a period of life — that spirited, intense and unforgettable time when everything was possible.

Each number the band performed swept the receptive audience. Soon, many were standing, swaying in their seats or keeping beat with the drummers. I admit I was singing along with the vocalists, but the music was so loud that I could karaoke unobtrusively.

There is something about the “horns” (trumpet, trombone and saxophone) that evoke in me a feeling of pure joy. When we arrived, we were tired from a long day, but the energy of the songs was such that soon we were “Feelin’ Stronger Every ...” song. I believe it’s that joyful sound that is directly involved in Chicago’s staying power.

According to its Web site, Chicago is the first American rock band to chart Top 40 albums in five consecutive decades. [Billboard Magazine’s](#) recent list of Top 100 artists of all-time puts Chicago at No. 13, the highest of a U.S. band. Its record sales top the 100 million mark, including 21 Top 10 singles, five consecutive No. 1 albums, 11 No. 1 singles and five Gold singles.

The group’s “Beginnings” were in Chicago, not surprisingly, in 1967. The pre-eminent dream for [Walter Parazaider](#), [Terry Kath](#), [Danny Seraphine](#), [Lee Loughnane](#), [James Pankow](#), [Robert Lamm](#) and [Peter Cetera](#) was to integrate all the musical diversity in Chicago into a new sound: a rock band centering on horns. Parazaider trained classically and pursued both genres for a while, but rock-and-roll won out when he realized he didn’t have the patience for a teaching career.

The tour lineup included Parazaider on woodwinds and other originals, Lamm on keyboards and vocals, Loughnane playing trumpet and Pankow on trombone. Newer members were [Jason](#)

[Scheff](#) with bass and vocals, [Tris Imboden](#) on drums, [Keith Howland](#) playing guitar, [Lou Pardini](#) on keyboards and vocals, and [Drew Hester](#) on percussion. Mosh pit revelers enjoyed occasional run-by hand grabs from band members.

The audience included not only grown-up “hippies,” but the hippies’ grown-up children as well, some of whom had brought their parents for a grand oldies performance. I met Eric Holmes, a programmer from [The Sound, 100.3 FM](#), who sat next to me and introduced his parents, visiting from Ohio. Holmes attends many concerts as part of his work and keeps a glass jar of neon orange earplugs on his desk. He graciously gave us some, which increased our enjoyment considerably.

Holmes deemed the show a medley of great vocal arrangements and brass.

“I knew a couple of the big hits going into the show, but ... Chicago hasn’t had the long-lasting effect on my peers as bands such as [Led Zeppelin](#) and [The Beatles](#) have,” he said. “The vocals were pretty right on, and the entire band could sing. It was really nice to see a band that uses real instruments.”

Holmes doubts that Chicago would have made it in today’s music environment, but added, “It was a great night out with my parents that I’ll never forget.”

Sustainable music for all time.

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton’s column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. Graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: The Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon at www.CanyonVoices.com.*