

The Final Word

with
Mark Toriski



Here We Are Now, Entertain Us

Recently I got the urge to rummage through some old things. I am somewhat of a hoarder but in the past few months I have actually been able to get rid of boxes of stuff that have laid dormant in my basement (this included *Rolling Stone* magazines that date clear back to high school and McDonalds Happy Meal toys that go back even further). Some things I will never get rid of though and one of these includes this little envelope I keep on my desk that is full of ticket stubs from concerts I've attended. About 95% of all my shows are present and accounted for and I love the instant nostalgia I get thumbing through the dozens of well-worn stubs. But it also bore truth to a common complaint you hear day after day about Erie.

Erie never has any great concerts.

And this wasn't always the case. Two of my stubs are in fact shows I saw here in Erie – the Mighty Mighty Bosstones at Gannon's Hammermill Center in 1996 (aka the height of this band's popularity) and Tool at the Civic Center (nee Tullio Arena) in 2002. And these aren't the only big name rock acts that have graced Erie. I vividly remember seeing side-by-side ads in the *Showcase* circa 1997 for concerts for Stone Temple Pilots and Marilyn Manson (both huge draws at the time) yet as I tell people today about all of these aforementioned shows, they stare at me like I am making this up (hell these acts aren't even far enough from relevancy yet to be even considered to headline Celebrate Erie – more on that in a second).

Our decline into mediocrity may actually begin on April 1, 2003, when the Planet (Erie's only new rock station) abruptly changed its format to country western, leaving us with either the Rocket (who is apparently obliged to play Journey every hour on the hour) or Gannon radio (which is an impressive station, but at the end of the day is still just a college station with limitations) to fill the void. With a few exceptions it seems that once the Planet left, so did any hope of getting some quality rock acts to come to Erie (and no I will not count Train as an exception as they are little more than generic music-makers for doctors' waiting rooms and crappy romantic-comedies). Ever since then, our "big name acts" have looked more like a playlist for every classic rock station (of which we unnecessarily have two), minus the meaty acts like Aerosmith, Zeppelin, and the Stones.

Celebrate Erie's annual announcement of its headlining act has become an annual joke among the 20-something crowd as the anticipation (sarcasm) builds for what big name act (sarcasm) they have somehow managed to convince (sarcasm) to come here in the midst of touring the globe (sarcasm) in support of their latest hit album (heavy

sarcasm). In recent years this distinguished list has included Kansas, Three Dog Night, Foreigner, and the former singer for Styx. Meanwhile Roar on the Shore is touting Great White and Slaughter as appearing at this year's festival with Grand Marshall Vanilla Ice – that entire paragraph reads like a Who's Who of VH1's *Celebrity Rehab*.

I'm not asking for a band on the scale of Radiohead or Foo Fighters to come to Erie, but there has to be acts out there that would be down for coming to our unique little city for a night. And it's not a question of having the venues. As previously mentioned, the Tullio has staged shows of a big scale so why not try to cash in on your upcoming renovations and start seeking some major talent for 2013? The Warner Theatre could definitely house a band like the Decemberists, who would seek a smaller, more intimate crowd and could utilize the theatre setting for some epic stuff. Or how about have a little fun and try to mix it up by doing something like a stripped down acoustic show from Rufus Wainwright or the Cold War Kids at the Crooked I (one of the few places around here anymore that seems to still try)? Cleveland and Pittsburgh both have smaller-scale clubs that have brought memorable performances to those cities so it's not a question of having the proper amenities; it's who wants to step up?

Of course there is one positive to this dilemma and it is the requisite trip to Cleveland or Pittsburgh that comes from trying to see a quality show in this area. And while this has become a pilgrimage of sorts and part of the fun of the experience of going to a show (and besides who doesn't like a good road trip with friends?), I've noticed as I get older the traveling time has become a deciding factor of whether or not I can actually go to a show. When I was in school it was just a matter of whether or not I had a test or paper due the next day, but now it's whether or not I can take the time off work, whether I need to be at the top-of-my-game the next day, or simply do I feel like going four hours round-trip for this particular show...and I can't believe I just said that. Now imagine if that travelling consisted of 10 minutes downtown? I may be older, but I still want to rock, plus I am nowhere near finishing that collection of ticket stubs.

Mark Toriski's all-time favorite concert was a Stone Temple Pilots and Red Hot Chili Peppers double-bill at Darien Lake Center for the Arts near Buffalo. He can be reached at mtoriski@gmail.com.