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Jefferson Starship Ignites Classic Rock Show



ADITYA ROHILLA/STAFF

Back from the dead. The Zombies opened for Jefferson Starship at the Regency Center Grand Ballroom.

By ALINA XU
CONTRIBUTING WRITER
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You could have cut the nostalgia with a knife at San Francisco's Regency Center Sunday night when the Zombies, then Jefferson Starship, took the stage. Aged hippies dominated the crowd, sharing the room with thirtysomethings and a smattering of college students. Even amid the venue's polished surfaces and teardrop chandeliers, a straggly trio of concertgoers rolling joints didn't seem out of place.

From singer Colin Blunstone's first ascending wail of "I love you, but the words won't come / And I don't know what to say," during set opener "I Love You," it was clear the Zombies would recreate their hazy, glorious psychedelia with ease and aplomb. Blunstone's voice, still tender and nuanced, carried the set, which centered around six tracks from 1967's *Odessey and Oracle*. Now an undisputed classic, it initially dropped without a whisper and over the decades amassed critical acclaim and a loyal following. The band delivered such hits as "Care of Cell 44" and "A Rose for Emily" with all the glittering perfection of the versions set down at Abbey Road over 40 years ago, down to the percussive "aaah"s and handclaps of "Time of the Season."

But the band's considerable talents were only fully showcased during selections from keyboardist Rod Argent's post-Zombies project, Argent. The heavy chords and driving bass rhythms of their biggest hit, "Hold Your Head Up," provided the framework for a spooky, labyrinthine keyboard solo. New guitarist Keith Airey produced a shrieking display of virtuosity, even executing a slow horror-film glissando with a beer bottle. They went out with another old favorite, the jaunty "She's Not There," which ended on a drum flourish and Blunstone's celebratory yowl.

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While the Zombies chiefly performed faithful renditions of their finest songs, Jefferson Starship served up a heady mix of styles

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that reflected three decades of lineup changes. In their latest incarnation, seven musicians-including two original members of the band's genesis, Jefferson Airplane-generated a dense, powerful sound that bordered at times on sensory overload, a fact not helped by the Regency's nonexistent acoustic subtlety.

Nonetheless, recent addition Cathy Richardson's dark, husky vocals made Jefferson Starship's performance difficult to fault. Lithe and soaring, her voice easily steered the band's raw, textured harmonies on numbers like "Count On Me" and proved her a worthy successor to legendary Jefferson Airplane vocalist Grace Slick. Richardson's occasional theatrics bizarrely complemented the band's delivery: to usher in the Slick-penned "White Rabbit," Richardson crouched below the mic and spread a black cape with multicolored fringe, taking on the appearance of a giant, staring bat. Where Slick's skeletal, predatory take had seemed to creep


along the edges of the song, Richardson assaulted it directly, lending a hoarsely authoritative air that rendered its hallucinatory "Alice In Wonderland"-inspired imagery all the more sinister: "Remember what the dormouse said: 'Feed your head. Feed your head. Feed your head.'"

Given the eclectic ground they traversed over the course of the night, it was almost easy to forget that Jefferson Starship had firm roots in the Haight-Ashbury folk revival of the mid-'60s. San Francisco has grayed and mellowed since then, lamented an original Airplane member: "Nobody dances anymore." Having elicited indignant cheers and a renewed wave of movement from the audience, the band launched into another Airplane gem, "Eskimo Blue Day." For a moment, it was as if they'd never left.

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