Beard & Little Johnny Reviews

Episode #25

**Heart & Cheap Trick**

Fiserv Forum, Milwaukee, WI

3-26-25

Greetings friends, fans, and followers and welcome to the Beard episode #26. Today we look at a couple of the elder statesmen (and women) in Rock N Roll’s storied history, The Wilson sisters of **Heart** and the Rockford natives and longtime collective known as **Cheap Trick**.

After learning that almost everyone in **Heart** was over seventy and most members of **Cheap Trick** were as well, Little Johnny took a pass on coming with for this event and it was up to Miss Kelly to fill in for the lad. So, we journeyed up to the big arena in Milwaukee, (the 18,000-seat Fiserv Forum), home of the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks’)

After a small dinner of tacos and beer (to avoid the super inflated arena prices at the Forum), we headed in and found decent seats above the floor but with only one row in front of us allowing a good straight shot view of the stage. Although not a sellout, the arena was close to three quarters full, so despite both acts having been around for over fifty years it seemed they still had strong drawing power.

At 8:00pm, the lights went out and the announcers voice said, “And now, the hardest working band in Rock, (*Clearly they will be served a lawsuit from Gene Simmons*) **Cheap Trick**.” And we were off and running, or to be more precise, stiffly walking.

**Cheap Trick**:

Still sporting long time and original members; singer *Robin Zandor*, guitarist *Rick Neilson*, bassist *Tom Peterson*, and now joined by their next generation members *Robin Taylor Zandor* (guitar) and *Daxx Neilson* (drums), both sons of the original members, **Cheap Trick** keeps it all in the family.

Coming out with “*Just got Back*” from “*All Shook Up*,” there was still an energy to the **Cheap Trick** experience, but you could tell that *Rick Neilson* was feeling his 76 years as his walks around the stage were stiff and painful looking. His guitar licks were still there but clearly not as fluid and crisp as even the last time I saw them six years ago.

“*Big Eyes*” from “*In Color*” followed and that one has been a staple in their set for almost the entire fifty years. It was still good to hear it live again. “*He’s a Whore*” harkened all the way back to the beginning album just called “*Cheap Trick*.” That one reminded me that **Cheap Trick** liked to mix that punk aesthetic right from their career start. “*In the Street*” followed and being a longtime fan of “That 70’s Show” of course I loved hearing that one.

“*Ain’t that a Shame*” came next and **Cheap Trick** did good service to the old **Fats Domino** chestnut. “*Downed*” from “*In Color*” was one I wasn’t familiar with, but I certainly knew “*I know what I want*” from “*Dream Police*” as that was one of my favorite **Cheap Trick** albums. Remember albums kids?

Up until now, I was in a mixed zone about my thoughts. The second-generation additions of Zandor and Neilson junior added punch and energy to the music and honestly the original three weren’t bad for being in their mid-seventies. When Zandor sr. began “*The Flame*” (perhaps the biggest charting single of their career), I figured it was time to find out exactly what he could still do.

Clad in an all-white suit with a wide brimmed hat, Zandor looked good and indeed like a rock star should. As he sang “*The Flame*” under a well-positioned sea of white lights, he still managed to make the song sound soulful while phone flashlights and even one actual old school lighter, (*way to commit sir*) lit up the arena.

With “*The Flame*”, (like *Stephen Tyler* with “*Dream On*”), it is all about THE note. Zandor stepped back, took a deep breath, and let go. (*You can see it live by checking out my TikTok page at thebeard0728.*) I do think he had a little help from the magic sustain button on the soundboard, but it was mostly still *Robin Zandor*, and I found myself nodding in approval of the moment.

The rest of the set was high gear hits. “*I Want you to Want Me*” brought back junior high school days when I first heard this band. “*Dream Police*” was an essential and I have even come to love *Rick Neilson’s* complete butchery of the speaking portion. I admit once upon a time I hated the way he did that section, but now it is uniquely him and it is like coming home to hear it. (*Once again, you too can hear it just check the TikTok page at thebeard0728*.)

**Cheap Trick** would wrap it up with “*Surrender*” and “*Goodnight*” which were just about perfect. In the end, I concede **Cheap Trick** have gotten old. But so have I and so we remain together. On musical talent alone (comparing them to their peak), I would have to say 83/100, but they got the icon bump for bringing me back to a different time in my life when there was far more road stretched out before me than behind me and for that they get an extra five points. So, **Cheap Trick** at the Forum 88/100

**Heart**

**Heart** has an extraordinarily long history having moved over forty different members through the band over their fifty-year career. The sole original members and constants are the Wilson sisters. Vocalist Ann and guitarist Nancy have been a part of all sixteen **Heart** albums. Of the remaining five current members, four joined in 2023 so right from the start most of “**Heart**” is not the classic lineup.

Additionally, Ann has suffered a few recent health scares and is now performing from a wheelchair after undergoing cancer surgery and follow up chemo. She also had a sling from a recent fall that broke her elbow. Ann was dressed beautifully, but there’s no denying she shows the physical signs of both being over seventy and so much recent illness. Much respect that she insists on still touring and performing. I guess when that is what you do, you feed off the adulation and emotion from the crowd and if it makes her feel whole and happy, I applaud her for it.

That said, *Nancy Wilson* has always been the preferred sister for the Beard. She is a good guitar player in general but really excels on acoustic. Even in her seventies, Nancy still has dexterous hands and a touch both light and heavy on the strings where needed. She may not be playing arpeggios anymore, but she is more than competent to keep churning out her own music on stage.

Honestly, the rest of the band were largely musicians for hire, and they filled in everything around the two stars without really shining themselves as was the plan I imagine.

Coming out to “*Bebe Le Strange*”, **Heart** went right into the classics with 80’s hit “*Never*” and 70’s charter “*Magic Man*.” Ann’s voice was definitely not what it was even back in 2016 but she can certainly still sing. “*Love Alive*” & “*Little Queen*” were for bigger fans than me as I didn’t know them but then they ran off a slew of ones I remembered.

“*Straight On*,” “*These Dreams*” & “*Crazy on You*” highlighted the mix between **Hearts** chart toppers from the 80’s and their more substantive material from the 70’s. I once again applaud *Nancy Wilsons* guitar work but not so much *Ann Wilsons* current voice.

The acoustic section, (which had all the members sitting or standing in a long row), featured “*Dog & Butterfly*,” “*Dreamboat Annie*,” and a very nicely performed cover of “*Going to California*.” I was surprisingly impressed by that one.

Nancy discussed touring with **Van Halen** (in the past) and her and *Eddie Van Halen’s* time together. He had written her a song back then and she repaid the kindness by playing an acoustic number she had written called “*For Edward*.” Although the song was nothing extravagant, you did get the feeling it was indeed heartfelt.

“*Alone*” went right into “*What about Love*” which brought Ann back to the forefront and she managed both songs well enough even if she no longer “goes for it” on the big notes. In a way I respect that because she could probably fake her way through it with the A.I. technology available today for singers. Ann preferred to just give the audience what she naturally had and that is the braver move. In a world where no Superbowl halftime show has been anything but fake for over a decade, *Ann Wilson* missing some notes (or working around them) gave a feeling of genuine authenticity.

After the big conclusion, Ann joked that they were all just going to stay out there for the encore portion because she wasn’t taking her wheelchair off and back on the stage, so they said, “we’ll just get right to it then.”

“*Sand*” was Ann’s tribute to a family friend that meant a lot to her. **Heart** then tried to get the crowd into it with another **Zeppelin** cover, this time “*The Ocean*, but the crowd just never really got superhot for it and the REAL crowd pop came when Nancy struck the familiar chords for “*Barracuda*.”

Although the whole band worked it as best they could, this song still lacked the BOOM energy it should have had as the finale. Afterwards, the band didn’t do the usual line up, pose and bow thing, instead they just sort of rolled Ann off the stage as a few waved.

I am glad to have seen **Heart** one last time, but I don’t think I need to do it again. The icon rules are complicated. I awarded **Cheap Trick** for “taking me back.” **Heart** never achieved that really. There were flashes and moments, but their set just never transported me to “back then.” As such I must weigh them vs. their former greatness and decide was this the rock ‘n roll **Heart** or the chart maker **Heart**? The answer is both and neither. I admire Ann’s will to keep going but she was a 93-95 singer at her peak and now she is more like 83-85.

Nancy was always a solid 85-90 guitarist, and she has retained most of that skill so I can grant her 87. The rest of the band, as I said before, were just hired guns. They aren’t really part of the **Heart** legacy as most of them have only been in the band long enough to learn where the coffee pot and the bathrooms were. I joke, but in a fifty plus year career, being a band member for less than two years isn’t really being a member of **Heart** in my opinion.

Ending ranking 85/100 and even that may be nostalgia bumping it up a point or two. Father time comes for us all and the Wilson sisters aren’t exempt.

So, that does it for episode #25 of Beard reviews. Thank you for reading watching & sharing. Check out the pictures and videos right here on Facebook by following **Mark McQueen**. Check out hundreds of videos on TikTok at **thebeard0728** and remember to look for our column on **themightydecibel.com** for the latest Metal coverage. Finally, stay tuned as there is always more material coming out there when it comes to the Beard.

Until next time, this was the Beard saying, Live Life. Stay Heavy & Horns Up.