



THE BOY LOOKED AT JOHNNY

On break from Springsteen on Broadway, Bruce lands with Patti Smith

The Monday night screening of the documentary Horses: Patti Smith and Her Band was, after all, another star-studded Tribeca Film Festival premiere, so the appearances of the likes of Clive Davis, Jon Landau, and Jimmy Iovine wasn't exactly unusual. Given that the film captures a live performance of Smith's now-classic debut album during the tour launched to commemorate that record's 40th anniversary, it made sense that the head of the label that signed Smith out of CBGB would be there, along with the upstart producer that helped her achieve what's widely regarded as her commercial breakthrough, and, well, the manager of the guy who let the upstart producer take an unfinished demo cassette across town to a sister Jersey swamp rat. Ancient history, but you could be easily forgiven if your mind connected those dots.



After the 70-minute film, the screen went up and the Patti Smith Group were in place behind it. The set had been advertised as "Patti and her Band will perform the title track of Horses along with some of their signature songs." It was a lovely bonus to hear the band whose history was just shown on film play live, but no one expected more than a handful of songs. From the right angle, you could see Iovine sitting in the wings, which made sense given his Executive Producer credit and the involvement of Apple Music as the film's distributor.

But what absolutely no one truly expected to happen was when, after performing "Land," Patti stepped up to the mic holding an I<3NY mug and, with a mischievous grin, offered thanks to Mr. Iovine before adding, "And I want to thank this fellow...."



There was a bit of a pregnant pause before none other than Bruce Springsteen strode onstage with an impish grin as the entire Beacon Theater lost their marbles. The two embraced, and Patti came back to the mic to note, "This song always makes me think of three men: Fred 'Sonic' Smith, who inspired it; Jimmy Iovine, who produced it; and Bruce Springsteen, who wrote it." Playing a sunburst Telecaster, Bruce joined Smith on the first chorus before stepping up for the second verse. "Because the night belongs to... Bruce," Smith sang, cueing him into a compact but satisfying solo. It was delightful to watch Bruce sing the words to himself on Smith's verses, only for her to do the same when he was at the mic. [video]



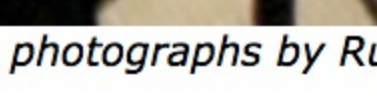
The two exchanged another embrace at the end, and just when we thought Bruce was going to be departing the stage, Kevin Buell made an appearance for a guitar change. "I have another song for you," Patti announced, before bringing on her daughter and... Michael Stipe! "Fred 'Sonic' Smith and I wrote this song with the great hope that it would inspire and incite people to action," Patti introduced what was, of course, her great anthem "People Have The Power" [video], which Bruce last performed (along with Stipe and R.E.M.) on the Vote For Change tour in 2004.



At the end, Smith hugged Stipe and her children and then Bruce, and the two walked offstage companionably holding hands. Six songs, two surprise guests, a theater of buzzing music fans, and a set of beautifully connected dots spanning across 40 years.



- April 24, 2018 - Caryn Rose on the scene - photographs by Ruth Barohn



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