

Erykah Badu
Tel Aviv Convention Center
February 2, 2008

Afro wig-loving neo-soul icon Erykah Badu brought plenty of baggage with her when she arrived in Tel Aviv last week. Commenting on regional tensions, she posted on the internet that her last scheduled performance prior to her impending double-disc *Nu AmErykah* release was to take place in Israel because "I want to fix it sooo bad." At a press conference on Thursday, she expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause and even defended infamously anti-Semitic Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

Regardless, several thousand Tel Aviv party people showed up to the Tel Aviv Convention Center on Saturday night for Badu's show. Flanked by three backup singers, two drummers, two keyboard players, a bassist and a flutist, Badu took to the stage only after her tight band had established a groove for several minutes. For almost two hours, she swayed in front of a center-stage mic stand with a small table to either side of her, one holding a laptop computer and a kettle, the other with a drum machine/sampler trigger board. More about laid-back, regal poise than about traditional verse-chorus pop sound bytes, it was Badu's distant yet powerful presence presiding over intense grooves that dominated the evening.

After reading a list of shout-outs that she pulled from her pocket – saying hello to the audiences tuning in to the Galei Tzahal simulcast, thanking the opening acts and saluting Lod-based Israeli-Arab rap ensemble DAM – Badu launched into a chant for Jerusalem that was based on old Negro spiritual styles.

Hip hop came of age in the Eighties by incorporating other musical milieus like soul, R&B, funk and disco, themselves fusions of other sounds, and when hip hop reinvents itself, it's by swallowing up still more styles – as in the case of Kanye West's 2007 hit "Stronger," which is built around a French house sample by Daft Punk. For over a decade, Badu has almost single-handedly made soul new, over and over again – often by referencing hip hop, creating a world where genres feed one another in cycles.

Badu wowed the Tel Aviv crowd early with "The Healer," a powerful new shamanistic single off of *Nu AmErykah*, proclaiming, "Hop hop is bigger than religion / Hop hop is bigger than my nigger / Hop hop is bigger than the government" in between verses about toppling Babylon ("The people say reboot refresh," etc.). The set culminated with Badu taking us "waaay back," brandishing a cowbell and meandering through a medley of old-school rap classics (like Slick Rick and Doug E Fresh's immortal "La Di Da Di") before explaining to us that all peoples are truly one and heading home.