

On Friday night we went to the Sydney Entertainment Centre to see the Motown 50 Event.

I didn't know what to expect ... revivals can be embarrassing, although I just recently participated in one myself in Ann Arbor which went well. I could imagine it being a disappointment, but you never know unless you go and see.

The place was about 3/4 full. About half the crowd was of my generation (I was 13 at the peak of Motown in 1965 growing up in the Detroit area), but also about half younger people gen X and gen Y ... are they up to "Z" yet?

It was like the old Motown Revue. Bands came on for 3 or 4 songs, their latest hits, then the next band comes out. In between acts an announcer whips up the crowd. In the old days these revues used to travel around the country on a big bus. Motown had one, Stax had one. It must have been interesting to be on those buses. Comradeship, shared triumphs and disasters, friendship and hardship, relationships both inter and intra-band forming and breaking up. I think there is a good HBO miniseries in that. The backing band travels on the bus and supports all the acts. In this case it was the full Motown 50 Orchestra: One or two survivors of the Funk Brothers, a great rhythm section, horns, director, etc. These guys sounded fantastic, everybody uses that word too much but this time it was no exaggeration.

Mary Wilson came on and did a Supremes set. She sounded great. I didn't miss Diana's voice. The backing girls were amazing. The Miracles fell a little flat ... it just wasn't right without Smoky's voice, although the band was excellent. Original Miracle Bobby Rogers was in the lineup and it was his 70th birthday. The compere asked the crowd to sing happy birthday to this nice old fellow, and the crowd obliged.

All the bands had at least one original member, and some other stars from other lineups, such as ex members of the Del Vikings, Spinners, etc.

Joan Osborne came on and sang, she was sensational in the "Standing In The Shadows of Motown" movie several years ago. She sounded like she belonged on that stage.

The Four Tops stole the show. Duke Fakir was there. We ran in to him last year at Detroit Airport, he was gracious and happy but at that time seemed tired and old. At the show he danced like he was 25. Some of the other guys are the sons of original members. They were killer in every way and had the crowd on it's feet dancing.

Martha Reeves had a wonderful set, she nailed it even though her voice was different with this weird vibrato. She had the crowd fascinated, naming all the stars who had covered Dancing In The Streets, there was about 20 of them, and then she pointed out that it was HER song. The crowd got up and testified. You do not see that every night in the Sydney Entertainment Centre.

The Temptations finished up the night, with their amazing hits. They pulled out their trademark dance moves. The new singers did a good job, their songs still sound fine, but sorry ... they didn't quite hit the level of greatness of the Tops.

The whole thing was a super entertaining nostalgia trip, but...

I felt sad for Detroit.

The city was once glorious. It was already in decline when Motown records started up 50 years ago. Car factories in the city had begun to close down in the late 50's and move out to the suburbs and neighboring towns: Pontiac, Flint, Willow Run, and farther. The population began to shrink. There was growing unemployment already, but all of that could have been borne. The city was considered a model of urban planning and had less inner city problems than most. There could have been a gradual transition, new industries and services could have moved in. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was felt in a positive way there. Detroit might have become great again, as it had in the 1920's and the postwar 40's and 50's.

At or near the peak of Motown Records greatness, the July 1967 riot hit. It only lasted about 4 days, but a large part of the inner city burned. More than 500 businesses were destroyed, many owned by black families. It was devastating. It was as if a nuke hit Detroit.

http://info.detnews.com/pix/photogalleries/newsgallery/07192007_67riots/index.htm

The gradual migration out of town became a flood. Jobs poured out. Drugs poured in. There were a series of carpetbagging corrupt city governments. Public money that should have gone to reconstruction and renaissance went to private pockets. It was like Beirut. On top of that, what was left of the car industry crashed. Detroit could not recover.

I went back there last year for a visit. Large tracts of land in the city are being reclaimed by the bush. Trees are growing tall in the ruins of once beautiful big houses. Crumbled

MOTOWN 50th ANNIVERSARY AT SYDNEY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE

remnants of factories and businesses decay almost gracefully now, as their reabsorption back into the earth visibly takes over.

Some of the old cool stuff is still there. Vickie's on Warren. Green's rib joint: still cookin'. The Fox Theatre is restored: I opened for the Stooges there a few years ago with Powertrane. It's glorious. The Tigers are playing at Comerica Park. Nice, but it can never replace Tiger Stadium on Michigan and Trumbull, abandoned, gone. So many things, and so much old time greatness. Gone.

Henry Ford once said "Detroit has it's problems, but with community action and people getting involvement in their government, (note he said "their government" not the other way around) the problems can be resolved.

What's left of Detroit is still waiting for that.