The Who rocks fans at the BI-LO Center

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CONCERT REVIEW

The mighty roar of Roger Daltrey's voice has faded somewhat through the years, but he and the rest of The Who proved Thursday night at the BI-LO Center that this band can still produce a thrilling evening of arena rock.

Musical partner Pete Townshend, the only other surviving member of the original group, noted that the concert marked The Who's first ever visit to South Carolina "and we're so glad we finally made it."

He said it like he meant it. The band's musicians played like they meant it, too.

Daltrey and Townshend were joined by eight others, including the great drummer Zak Starkey (Ringo's son), for a muscular, hard-charging performance of Townshend's 1973 rock opera "Quadrophenia" in its entirety.

They capped that off with several of their biggest hits, including "Pinball Wizard" and "Won't Get Fooled Again."

Extended tunes like "5.15" and "Drowned" from "Quadrophenia" developed into the rock equivalent of show-stoppers.

The fierce, angry band of yesteryear, famous for its instrument-destroying antics, has been replaced by a group of musicians who love making a joyful noise.

Even the often-moody Townshend, 67, seemed to be having a great time, and the band's instruments survived to rock 'n' roll another day.

The BI-LO Center crowd of mainly baby boomers cheered The Who's other trademark feats — Daltrey's enthusiastic mic slings and Townshend's windmill-style slashes on his red and white Fender.

Daltrey's rasp was unmistakable, if thinner, but he managed to knock out the high wails of "Love, Reign O'er Me" and later worked up a satisfying primal scream for the end of "Won't Get Fooled Again."

At 68, Daltrey still relishes the opportunity to show off his well-chiseled pecs under an unbuttoned shirt. More power to him.

The story of "Quadrophenia," the existential breakdown of a young man, was aided by three circular video screens, providing visuals of social uprising, notable historic events from the last few decades and early photos of The Who.

The near-capacity audience offered shouts of approval for tributes to deceased Who members John "The Ox" Entwistle and Keith Moon.

Entwistle's virtuosic bass solo on "5.15" was incorporated visually and aurally into the on-stage band's performance of that tune. The same happened for drummer Moon's narration of "Bell Boy."

The Who's current lineup was fantastic, including bassist Pino Palladino, three keyboardists, Starkey on drums, Townshend's brother Simon on guitar, and two sassy horn players (one of whom offered a dandy piccolo trumpet solo on "The Dirty Jobs").

The crowd really erupted when The Who played its classic chart-busters "Baba O'Riley," "Pinball Wizard," "Behind Blue Eyes," "Who Are You" and "Won't Get Fooled Again."

As Townshend said earlier, it took a while — only about 50 years — for the band to make it to South Carolina.

Worth the wait?

For these legends, you bet.

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