



February 13, 2012

## Trey Anastasio and The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

By Eric Moore



Things seemed backwards Thursday night at Symphony Hall in Atlanta, Georgia. Trey Anastasio was playing guitar in front of a sold-out crowd, but there were no glow sticks, no psychedelic lights, no dancing, no Shakedown and certainly no joints being passed around.

People actually sat in their seats through Trey's performances of Phish classics, a Beatles cover and some of his own solo material. Maybe most jarring of all the unique images that night were dreadlocked fans donning suits and ties.

Alongside the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for the first of four scheduled events with classically trained musicians this winter/spring, all the distinctive differences from the average Phish performance made this event all the more special.

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It was interesting to see the symbiosis of two very different worlds work so seamlessly together. There was a clear dichotomy in the audience between Phish/Trey fans and a markedly tamer orchestra crowd. Surprisingly, this show surely pleased both audiences.

Trey did an exceptional job of infusing Phish playfulness into the beautifully complex orchestral arrangements, which undoubtedly pleased the most cerebral orchestra aficionados.

The only electrical equipment in Symphony Hall was a single amp that powered Trey's guitar. The acoustics inside the theater are unrivaled by any arena, amphitheater or venue. The sound of the wind chime and bongo drum, which

would typically be blasted out of high-tech speakers, naturally and beautifully carried all the way to the back of the room.

Although you might have mistaken the crowd for bourgeoisie symphony-goers, it was clear there were Phish fans in the house when Trey took the stage in a Johnny Cash black suit and picked up his guitar in front of the conductor.

The first notes were clear – the beginning riff of “First Tube” obviously pleased the crowd. The guitar then gave way to the string section which gently moved from the foreground to the back as the entire horns section took up the “Tube” progression.

Trey then picked up his acoustic guitar, much to the delight of the crowd, and started off on one of the more country, down-home tunes in the Phish catalog, “Water in the Sky.” Again, the acoustics of Symphony Hall simply cannot be understated. The slow plucking notes of “Water in the Sky” carried beautifully out front of a soft string section.

Upon finishing “Water in the Sky,” Trey continued acoustically with the beginning notes of “Divided Sky.” Slowed down considerably, the downtempo tune really allowed for acoustic emphasis on each and every note. Although there was a moment of miscommunication between Trey and the conductor, an improvised smile and nod from Trey amused the crowd as he picked right back up with whimsical notes.

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Next, “Brian and Robert” brought out a theme that would continue throughout the entire performance – Trey at his absolute vocal best. Combined with the amazing acoustics, a soft and clear “this one is for you.” paired with some wonderful acoustic progressions put smiles on a lot of faces.

Trey then switched back to his electric guitar as he announced that he would be performing a world premiere. Although “Goodbye Head” has been performed a number of times with his solo band, it made its orchestral debut Thursday night. The reeds, horns and strings really married well on this one, with multiple builds and climaxes. Some of the more unique components of the orchestra came out as well, with the xylophone and tambourine adding a lot of flavor to this tune.

“Guyute,” a historically orchestral centerpiece for Trey, included much of “My Friend, My Friend” and was performed flawlessly. Noteworthy on this song was the segue between electric and acoustic guitars by Trey.

“The Story of the Ghost” classic moved perfectly into the ever-personal Trey Band tune “Let Me Lie.” The orchestra really took a backseat to Trey on this one with a soft string harmony behind Trey’s acoustic guitar and pitch perfect voice. “Let Me Lie” is a deeply personal song which was written during Phish’s hiatus, and the powerful emotion within the track shined through.

The first set ended with the spirited and lively Phish vibe that fans know and love in an acoustic version of “Stash.” Although throughout a majority of the performance you could hear a pin drop, (which made for amusing moments when glass bottles were knocked over), the crowd got audibly involved in “Stash.”

Confused faces from regular orchestra fans were prevalent during the clapping and fan participation segments of the song. This made “Stash” the highlight of the first set.

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The energy during this song was palpable, despite the fact that there was no moving or dancing.

The second set began with another orchestral classic for Trey, “Time Turns Elastic.” The 20 plus minute version was arranged beautifully and incorporated layers of sound from each and every section of the orchestra. Trey’s voice during “Elastic” seemed to reach into the audiences’ heads and give our brains a big sensual kiss. The complexity of

arrangements in this song was nothing short of incredible. "Time Turns Elastic" took the beauty queen crown for the night.

Trey then moved into "If I Could," continuing his vocal and acoustic excellence. The middle of this song was accompanied by a stirring frenzy in the center of the audience in the orchestra pit. Although it was hard to tell what was going on from the balcony, it became clear during the segue between "If I Could" and "You Enjoy Myself" that Trey had congratulated a couple who had apparently gotten engaged during the song.

"You Enjoy Myself" was subsequently dedicated to the couple and the introductory portion of the song included a short tease of "Here Comes the Bride," which was really special. "You Enjoy Myself" was surely another highlight of the night. As an improvisational fan-favorite, Trey incorporated some classic guitar improvisations. The lyrics "man," "god" and "shit" were creatively replaced by trombone noises, which thoroughly delighted the crowd.

The lyrics "wash Uffizi, drive me to Forenze" were also unmistakably replaced with violin notes. The second set ended with Trey's incredible vocals on full display. "You Enjoy Myself" was completed with some lovely a cappella melodies, which aren't unusual in "YEM," but were particularly amplified on this night.

Trey's first encore was a cover of a Beatles classic, "Golden Slumbers > Carry Thy Weight," which leant itself so perfectly to a full orchestra. This was almost certainly the bustout of the night. The version included a percussion solo and a horn arrangement which blew the top off the audience.

The show ended with a short version of "The Inlaw Josie Wales." The soft instrumental bit was perfect to wind down the show and brought the spotlight back on Trey before he and the orchestra took a final bow.

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Although there weren't rip-roaring jams or wild dancing wooks, this show brought a completely unique vibe. That is, until phans hit the street and the nitrous tanks came out. Yes, it was funny to see the orchestra crowd confused as to why people were sucking on balloons as they waited for their cars at the valet, but it really reflected poorly on Phish fans.

Regardless, this show was truly special in its uniqueness. This performance was a compositional masterpiece and hats should go off to Trey and the entire Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. If you can get to Pittsburgh, Denver or Los Angeles for one of these shows, make sure you do so.

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## 02.09.2012 – Symphony Hall – Atlanta, GA

**Set I:** First Tube, Water In The Sky, Divided Sky, Brian and Robert, Goodbye Head, Guyute, Let Me Lie, Stash

**Set II:** Time Turns Elastic, If I Could, You Enjoy Myself

**Encore:** Golden Slumbers > Carry The Weight > The End, The Inlaw Josie Wales