

Homeland

Laurie Anderson
& Eyvind Kang (Viola), Jamsied Sharifi (Keyboards), Skuli Sverrisson
(Bass).

Sydney Opera House Theatre, Monday 22/10/07

Review by Damian Castaldi

One of the first concerts I ever went to growing up in Melbourne was Lou Reed. I remember it well and we had a pretty wild night. Regrettably I've never managed to see Laurie Anderson, having missed her twice at the Adelaide festivals and as both "Laurie and Lou" are two strong musical influences (and now partners) I was really looking forward to this.

Her Hot Seat review/interview with Stephany Bunbury in the Oct 20-21 Spectrum described the work as Anderson's, *"typically sidelong look at this moment in American history"*, with the core subject being the war in Iraq. Stephany went on to write that *"Homeland begins with a story from Aristophanes about birds obliged to fly forever over the earth because they have nowhere to settle; what she wants to address, but obliquely, is the idea of identity and belonging. The war on terror, she says, is a war of ghosts and chimera: there is no country called terror, no border you can cross to get to it. "You are nowhere, except in your mind," she says, "It comes from a very mental place, this concept of where you belong, who you are, whatever."*

Fresh from the Melbourne International Arts Festival where they played last week and now at the Sydney Opera House on a balmy spring night a good crowd gathered for her 2nd performance. Fortunately for a few of us cheap ticket holders (back row P22) the audience was not quite large enough to pack the theatre and just before the concert started we we're re-seated further down into a large block of empty seats, fabulous!

The 4-piece band started straight off with a lyrical, whimsical piece that set the mood for the evening. Each new song blended into the other, often starting in from the last faded note of the previous so for the first half hour we we're treated to a continuous stream of gentle, sometimes rhythmical and very classic Anderson music. It was a relatively static performance with no visual component apart from washes of colour and with a mostly seated viola, bass guitar and keyboard accompaniment Laurie Anderson performed standing in front of her keyboard/sequencer/computer, singing/story telling in only the way she can and occasionally playing her specially-modified electric violin (with its famous recording head built into it across which she draws a tape-equipped bow).

Homeland is a brave performance from an influential New York based artist about to be awarded the Dorothy and Lillian Gish prize for her contribution to

creating beauty in the world and to mankind's enjoyment and understanding of life. That's all very lovely but in 2007 the message she brings to the world is anything but beautiful, it's downright horrifying! AMERICA TODAY, deeply twisted within the chaos of the Iraq war, with President Bush about to push for another huge budget rise for another year in Iraq and our own wimpish prime minister sadly believing he can influence the outcome of Bush's decision making (if you listened to the PM debate on Sunday night and THAT question he failed 3 times to answer).

The world should be listening to Laurie Anderson. The world really needs to be listening to performers like Laurie Anderson. She comes from the heart and the head, a mature and informed perspective, a highly provocative woman who is also fresh from a two year artist-in-residence at NASA. She is also a consummate performer and has a wicked sense of humour. Throughout the singing and story telling in Homeland she revealed to the audience that it's a kiddies war this Iraq war, what else can they afford; experts, experts, experts rule, they have the final say and whores and underpants abound. Corporate America rules! This private war is making a lot of people a lot of money and it's out of control. It's a dog eat dog sort of world, even as far back as BIG SCIENCE if you we're listening to her back then, you might remember "*great big signs, and they all say, ah, ah, ah, a ley lull ya, yo de lay he who, every man for himself*".

There's a lot you can do musically with an acoustic/electronic 4-piece. Both keyboards we're hooked into computers, running sequencers and the bass and particularly viola created strong rhythmic and harmonic structures throughout most songs. Laurie has 2 voices on stage. One is distinctly her female voice both pure and processed and the second is an intriguing male voice. She uses them to the max and although her female persona shines throughout the male had its moments particularly when it came time to introduce the members of the band. They played a good 90-minute + set and when the very enthusiastic crowd insisted on an encore we we're treated to an oldie but Goldie from her early 1982 album BIG SCIENCE, "Let X=X". For me the singing, drumming and bagpipes on the track "Sweaters" from the same album turned my world around. I thought it was the craziest love song I'd ever heard! 25 years later I'm still in love with Laurie Anderson's music.

Laurie streams her music around the clock at: www.laurieanderson.com

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