



## Sufjan Stevens stretches out, sells 'Adz' in concert

BY RICHARD GIRALDI Oct 16, 2010

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Early in his career Sufjan Stevens made a name for himself by performing narrative-driven, heart-wrenching indie folk tunes. But his latest CD, "The Age of Adz," is draped in an electronic and computerized veil and is a departure from his last original full-length, 2005's "Illinoise." But "Adz" offers a sense of achievement for the 35 year-old Stevens in that he sounds completely comfortable branching out on these musical endeavors - for the first time in years.

On Friday night, Sufjan Stevens performed a two-hour set - leaning heavily on the new material - to a sold-out crowd at the Chicago Theatre. Though a few songs on "Adz" sound almost completely computer generated, the live arrangements of the



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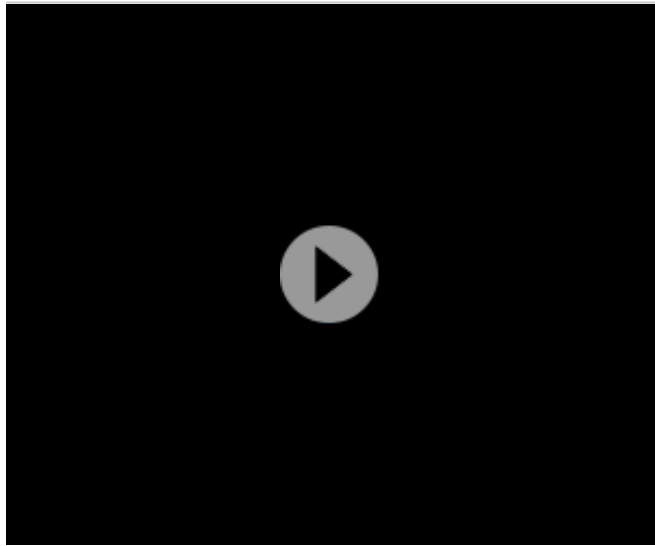
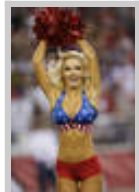


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new material never sounded pre-processed because of Stevens' use of a full band, which added depth and vitality. For an audience likely hearing these songs for the first time, that certainly helped.

Using dueling drummers, live guitars and a horn section to re-create the record's beefy synthesized moments, the glitch-y "Too Much" and the break beat-filled "I Walked" sounded more like big progressive-rock numbers. The energy from the "Adz" material, however, made the slower, reflective pieces, such as the finger-plucked "Heirloom" and haunting ballad "The Owl and the Tanager" from his free EP earlier this year, "All Delighted People," seem sleepy and lethargic in comparison.

If there was one instance in which Stevens' new approach fell flat, it was during the third movement of the 25-minute opus "Impossible Soul," during which the song evolved into a club ready, hip-hop beat complete with Auto-Tuned vocals. While it's definitely a new sound for Stevens, it came off as a bit silly with the backup vocalists wearing stiff-brimmed baseball caps and sunglasses while Stevens himself performed an awkward interpretive dance. The crowd still enjoyed it, however, as many took to dancing in the aisles until ushers directed them back to their seat.

Before the encore, Stevens reminisced about running away to Chicago when he was younger and went on to say it's much more fun to run away these days with a tour bus, catering and a hotel room. This was followed by the opening piano strikes to arguably Stevens' best-known song, "Chicago," which garnered the largest crowd response of the evening. Afterwards, a subdued encore featured a few cuts from "Illinoise," including the whimsical, banjo-lead journey "Decatur" and the tragic "John Wayne Gacy Jr."

Richard Girdali is a Chicago writer and the editor-in-chief at loudlooppress.com.

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