

The Black Keys deliver unbalanced, yet intriguing set at the Aragon

BY RICHARD GIRALDI December 31, 2010 2:26PM

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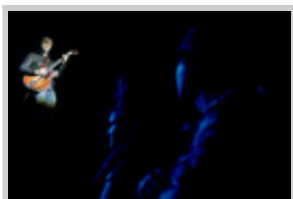
Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys performs during their set Dec. 30 at the Aragon. Entertainment Content | 0/10

The Black Keys would rather lay down a mean groove than change the face of music. The Akron, Ohio, rock 'n' roll duo aren't exactly the most innovative band out there as they tend to lean heavily on grungy, blues riffage and stripped down Zeppelin backbeats. For a time, the Black Keys separated themselves from similar guitar-and-drum outfits with the gravy-



thick, soulful howl of front man Dan Auerbach.

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Yet with the May 2010 release of their latest record, “Brothers,” the Black Keys stepped even further away from the old two-piece cliché by adding bass and keyboard, which is a move that adds a whole new level to their live performance.

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On Dec. 30, the Black Keys performed one of three sold-out shows (through Jan. 1) at the Aragon. There is no debate the band is at the top of its game as Auerbach and drummer Patrick Carney performed with the intensity and drive of classic rock veterans. Their passion, however, couldn't make up for an unbalanced set list that featured a middle section focused on their new songs instead of alternating them with their older material, which invariably garnered the biggest crowd reactions.

The Black Keys started off fiery and furious with the sexy, fuzz riffs of “Thickfreakness,” and really locked it in with a feverish version of “The Breaks,” which was far more beefy and explosive live than the original, nearly lo-fi version on their 2002 debut. A few of their old songs did fall flat, however, including the overplayed “10 AM Automatic,” which has lost all of its edge by appearing on countless television shows and commercials, and the especially derivative blues take, “Stack Shot Billy.” But Auerbach and Carney made up for the weaker song choices with energy. They never once let up on the throttle and were completely drenched in sweat merely minutes into the show.

However, the most musically engaging portion of the set came midway through when keyboardist Leon Michels and bassist Nick Movshon joined Auerbach and Carney for a slate of songs from “Brothers.” With the extra musicians, the Black

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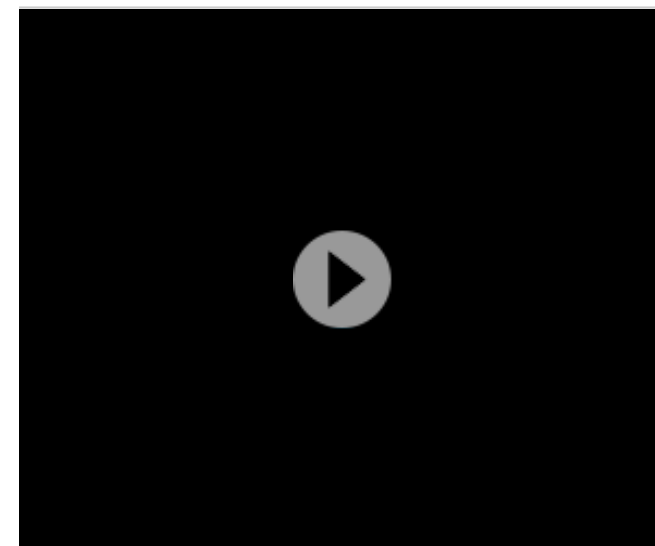

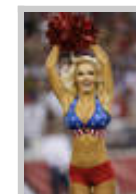



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Keys' blues-rock approach became more fleshed out. The additional low end provided Auerbach the opportunity to explore the melodic side of his guitar as heard on the creeping leads from "Howlin' For You," and the keyboard added additional harmonies that he played off of during his sultry croon on "Ten Cent Pistol."

Later, the band stripped back down to a duo and ripped into their biggest hits such as "I Got Mine" and "Your Touch." While the "Brothers" material was the most intriguing of the night, it was the Black Keys' big, muscular riff rock that struck the right chord with the crowd.

Richard Girdali is a local free-lance writer.


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