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Reunited Dispatch has passion and purpose



Chad Urmston performs during the opener of "Dispatch: Zimbabwe," a benefit that stretched over three nights. (ramin talaie for the boston globe)

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Dispatch: Zimbabwe

A benefit concert by Dispatch

At: Madison Square Garden, Friday night

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By Steve Morse, Globe Correspondent | July 16, 2007

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NEW YORK -- When Dispatch played its farewell show before 100,000 people at the Hatch Shell three years ago, you could have marked it with an asterisk because it was a free gig. Of course many people would turn out for a free concert on a pristine summer day, though the numbers were indeed overwhelming and many fans came from around the world to say goodbye to this famously unsigned, grass-roots-popular Boston band.

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Friday night's Dispatch reunion was another story. Fans plunked down hard-earned cash to see "Dispatch: Zimbabwe," a benefit concert that felt almost like Live Aid in its sincere message to eradicate famine and injustice on the African continent.

What's more, the band sold out all three Madison Square Garden shows over the weekend (an unprecedented feat for an

unsigned act) and expected to clear \$1 million for the cause.

"We can't believe this is happening. This is a dream come true," Dispatch singer Chad Urmston said Friday from a massive, full-production stage that included overhead video screens beaming footage of the dire situation in Zimbabwe.

Although part of the audience was too drunk and stoned to notice, many still respectfully watched and were moved by images of drought victims, HIV sufferers (Zimbabwe has the second-highest infection rate in the world, according to one video segment), and orphaned children.

The concert also appropriately featured the African Children's Choir, which was euphorically received.

The wrenching Zimbabwe footage was a challenging contrast to the mostly uptempo, excellently played music, which the crowd sang along to as though Dispatch were the second coming of the Dave Matthews Band or Phish. Dispatch merged many rhythmic styles, from reggae ("Ride a Tear") and jazzy rock (co-singer Pete Francis Heimbold sang "Lightning") to Latin (Brad Corrigan jumped out from behind his drums to sing "Fallin'").

The unquestioned highlight, though, was when these three Middlebury College graduates (all in their early 30s now) sat on chairs for an acoustic set on the roof of their longtime touring van nicknamed Wimpy. Urmston, Heimbold, and Corrigan then stood on the chairs for a song. It was crazy to see them act like such daredevils, but with three sold-out nights at Madison Square Garden, who could blame them? ■

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