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Dispatch sends a powerful message at benefit show

By Eli Golden

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NEW YORK -- Dispatch: Zimbabwe was a celebration.

Not only was it a celebration of a three-member Boston band back together after its breakup three years ago. Nor was it merely a celebration of the band's ability to sell out three shows at New York's Madison Square Garden, becoming the first independent group to headline the venue.

It was a celebration of music and its unique power to change the world.

On Friday night, the first of a three-concert series, the band ripped through classic songs as if it never broke up.

Opening with the rocked-out singalong "Here We Go," Dispatch launched into its set with the type of energy one has come to expect from the Boston natives. However, there were no stereotypical cries of "we're back." Instead, Dispatch took to the background, allowing its message to take center stage: Zimbabwe.



Dispatch

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After playing its last show to an overwhelming Hatch Shell crowd of nearly 110,000 in 2004, the members of Dispatch realized that in order to raise awareness of the perils in Zimbabwe, where guitarist Chad Urmston lived for six months when he was 18, they had to reunite for a series of benefits.

Friday night, by the power of big-screen documentary, concertgoers were reminded of the turmoil in Zimbabwe. A victim of economic downfall, HIV epidemics and drought, the country is on the brink of destruction.

"If Zimbabwe was a business, today they'd be closing their doors," Dispatch drummer Brad Corrigan told the crowd.

With first-hand stories of peril, the documentaries continuously faded in and out, acting as transitions between Dispatch's sets.

Dispatch also welcomed several Zimbabwean guests, including a tribal dance group, a children's choir and a band called Bongo Love. The acts offered interesting takes on such Dispatch classics as "Flying Horses," "Out Loud" and the Zimbabwe-themed "Elias."

All profits from the shows are going to aid the people of Zimbabwe, including donations from such businesses as Crocs, which is donating 10,000 of its sandals to Zimbabwean children.

Three Boston guys are proving that by uniting people through music, they can change the world -- and that's what music is all about.

DISPATCH

Madison Square Garden in New York, Friday night.

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