

Arts and Leisure: Heart's beat goes on with live 'Dreamboat Annie' concert

by David L. Coddon

"Dreamboat Annie's" comin' 'round the bend again.

HEART BEATS ON - Heart guitarist and co-founder Nancy Wilson (left) says the 1976 'Dreamboat Annie' album 'was our calling card, the first big imprint of our band.' CNS Photo courtesy of Kevin Winter. The 1976 album that introduced the rock 'n' roll world to a rockin' sister act - Ann and Nancy Wilson's Heart - has turned 31 and gone multimedia. The Wilsons performed "Dreamboat Annie" in its entirety in April at L.A.'s Orpheum Theatre. Resulting from that show was a concert CD and an accompanying DVD, "Heart: Dreamboat Annie Live," which was just recently released.

In addition to the chronological performance of "Dreamboat Annie," the DVD offers encore footage of Heart covering, among other songs, Pink Floyd's "Goodbye Blue Sky," The Who's "Love, Reign O'er Me" and a couple of tunes from a band that's inspired the Wilsons from the beginning, Led Zeppelin: "Misty Mountain Hop" and "Black Dog."

If your memory needs refreshing, "Dreamboat Annie" is the record that featured Heart's popular "Magic Man" and "Crazy on You," plus the lilting title song. The album was an FM radio hit, reaching No. 7 on the national charts, and brought guitarist Nancy and vocalist Ann to the forefront of women in rock.

"It was our calling card, the first big imprint of our band," recalls Nancy Wilson. "It had a lot of elegance, but it also rocked pretty hard for the time. Although when you hear it these days, it seems very tame. The production values of the day were a lot different. There weren't so many bells and whistles. It was really warm and sweet, built for vinyl."

Re-creating "Dreamboat Annie" for the Orpheum concert, Wilson says, was challenging. "We hadn't played a lot of those songs in a while. There's one song, called 'Sing Child,' that Ann is just not a fan of anymore. She just thought it was kind of like a bar-band song. I tried to 're-translate' it so Ann might consider redoing it.

"It turned into one of the better moments of the show because it is so different (from the original '76 recording)."

"Dreamboat Annie" was recorded as a concept album. (Its track list: "Magic Man," "Dreamboat Annie," "Crazy on You," "Soul of the Sea," "White Lightning & Wine," "I'll Be Your Song," "Sing Child," "How Deep It Goes" and the "Dreamboat Annie" reprise.)

Wilson believes she understands why the record was embraced as it was: "It was unusual to hear a band like this, with a female singer who is so rockin'. Largely you would get more a sort of ornamental singer, doing pop songs as a solo, and this was a rock band. We weren't afraid to turn it up to 11, either."

The Wilson sisters, raised primarily in Seattle, didn't realize they were breaking any ground 30 years ago.

"We came from a musical and supportive family," Nancy says. "With the gift of Ann's voice being the way it is, we never thought, 'We shouldn't try to do this because nobody else is doing it.' ... We were just following the call that we felt from The Beatles and the whole cultural revolution of the '60s, where everything was possible."

A respected rock guitarist who earned that respect, Wilson is a bit surprised that so few women have followed in her footsteps. "I always expected a lot more women to come to the fore in real rock bands, and I think what happened is, it got derailed in the '80s because of MTV, and the corporate image-making got more important than the musicianship in many ways."

But she remembers, happily, that "so many girls did write us letters, and a lot of them would let us know that they'd gotten over their 'fear of flying' in many ways by emulating what we were doing."

What they're doing is still playing music - the band just wrapped up a Canadian tour, and sister Ann's solo album, "Hope and Glory," hit stores this fall. If Heart is an oldies act, you wouldn't know it from its audiences.

"We've been out for the last five years on summer tours," Nancy says, "and we see every age of person showing up at our shows: a lot of really young kids with their parents, and a lot of college kids who crave something that has history attached to it that they know is authentic."

Like "Dreamboat Annie."

"It's a good time to be reiterating this album," Wilson says, "because there are a lot of people who deserve something that is real."

Arts and Leisure: Heart's beat goes on with live 'Dreamboat Annie' concert by David L. Coddon