

Diana at the Congress Hall in Hamburg, July 13 - 2005

This intimate evening with Miss Ross was to be my second time to see her live. Personally I love the magic of the huge arena-settings with Diana shining on the center stage, and I will never forget that stronger-than-ever-spectacle in Ahoy last year, when she was strutting her stuff for two-and-a-half-hours. There was a point she wanted to make and she made it: I'm back!

The approach this time was different. As she replied to Dutch star interviewer Ivo Niehe last year when he asked how she saw her own future: "I am starting to look at downsizing in my life. My ego doesn't require a lot. I wanna simplify, smallsize." On top of that, she made it clear that her health was the most important thing for her above all. Given these shifted priorities, it's remarkable to see how many concert dates she has scheduled in Europe this summer. And very understandably she keeps a tighter limit to the amount of time spent on stage each night. No more burn outs, that's in the past.

Last year I was sitting second ring way up high in an arena, now front row in this intimate theatre. I couldn't believe being able to see her up close like that. A superb 'I'm Coming Out' in the gorgeous pink flamenco dress was priceless. We've all seen the threefold change she does in it, and still I can't get enough of her unravelling act. During 'Chain Reaction' something happened to her microphone. Apparently the little battery had fallen out, and it took a moment before it was clear what had happened. A quick exchange of mics with the audio-guy brought everything back to normal, and it was fun to be in on her frowning and confusion for a sec. It made her human and a legend at the same time.

It was so cool to notice Diana looking straight into my eyes for a moment and mimicking my movements during 'Stop! In the Name of Love', doing the 'Think it Ow-ow-ver'-finger together. She gave everyone some time together, looking at the brilliant and happy dancing along the front row, further up the room and along the crowded pathways. This hall was not filled till the last seat, but then again many people had stepped out of their seats to come closer to the stage.

When she had closed her Supremes songs with 'You Can't Hurry Love', the applause was so wild and long, that she couldn't get started with 'Touch Me in The Morning'.... She was laughing her famous giggle while the Touch Me-intro kept going: "You're having me for more than an hour still!" She wasn't going anywhere yet.

I couldn't get over the contrasts in her appearance: from up close she was so beautiful, fragile and strong at the same time. The figure of a petite Française and the face that I only knew from close ups during tv-specials, the voice that was able to reach all the way in the back in Central Park. So often celebrities seem to look smaller in real life. During Love Child she made us aware of the music - something got caught in her throat and while trying to get over the coughing, looking down at the floor and working her feet in a subtle rythm, the band went deeper into the song. She would walk toward the percussions and hold the mic close to them. The attention she gave her band members was full of admiration for them.

The Boss was so awesome to hear her do, and she could get the high notes like a breeze, her voice was strong and smooth. During 'I'm Still Waiting' she urged us to sing along, and we did our superbest. Everyone I heard around me knew the lyrics.

Unlike an earlier observation I read, I did not have the impression at all that she was bored singing 'Upside Down' or any other classic that she must have sung a thousand times. She was there, more than a 100 %, giving so much of herself to us. She was having fun! 'Ease on Down the Road' brought the house down - we were still up on our feet since she had appeared on the stage! It formed a good contrast with the Lady Day songs that followed. A moment to sit and see her bring out her sensitivity. Not keeping back anything, velvet voice, gorgeous night club appearance with the dress and matching tiara.

When you keep a close eye on the completed shows, the setlists as well as the costume changes are somewhat predictable. I didn't mind that at all though. One of the pleasant surprises to me was that she did the last segment of the show with Mahogany & Ain't No Mountain in her new yellow royal dress. It was either that or the green/lime shining dress. Give me Ain't No Mountain in Royal Yellow anytime!!

So we didn't get 'It's My Turn', or 'When You Tell Me', or 'Endless Love'..so what...? Diana was out there for us, top form, and loving it. After 'I Will Survive' and her reprise with half the band and her backing vocals coming forward to the stage for a last goodbye, the audience kept yelling 'Zugabe' (encore), but this was really it.. for now..

I loved the show and also having the chance to meet a few of the fans whose messages I read on the various groups and message boards. I wish everyone who still has a show (or two) to look forward to a wonderful time. If the efforts have succeeded, I will post a few small screen video clips my friend and I tried to make during parts of the show.

Niels