

Brazilian Queen Lee in the Apple

Contributed by Ernest Barteldes
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After more than a decade without playing in New York, Rita Lee and her band came onstage at Manhattan's Town Hall for the first leg of her three-date tour through the United States.

By Ernest Barteldes

She definitely did not disappoint the crowd that filled the Midtown theater, and she belted out hit after hit from her 36-year career (a total of 22 songs), including some material from the band that got her started, Os Mutantes.

Dressed in black tight-fitting pants, a black T-shirt and a new spiky hairdo, she cheerfully greeted the audience as she entered the stage during the chords of the first song, "Saúde" (Health), a tune from the 1982 album of the same name.

Everyone sang along, and they continued to do so when Rita and the band (which included husband Roberto de Carvalho and son Beto Lee on guitars and legendary bassist Dadi Carvalho of Novos Baianos fame) drifted on to "Nem Luxo, Nem Lixo" (Neither Luxury nor Trash), another hit from the eighties.

Among her own songs, she included several tunes from her highly successful English-language album, Bossa N' Beatles (released in Brazil as "Aqui, Ali e em Qualquer Lugar"), such as the Jorge Benjor-inspired take on "A Hard Day's Night" and the psychedelic bossa-nova arrangement for "Lucy in The Sky With Diamonds."

Another cover of sorts included a tribute to the Ramones through a Portuguese-language version of their "I Wanna Be Sedated."

In between songs, she would crack jokes at the audience in response to their shouts. In one moment, someone screamed "Say something about Bush", and she responded with "Why should I do that? I've got (former São Paulo mayor) Paulo Maluf to badmouth about!"

In another moment, she paused to comment that when she travels abroad, she has to remind people that she is a Brazilian performer even though she has "no tits and no ass", a self-mockery on her famed thinness.

One of the highlights of the show was when Rita put on a clown's nose to sing "Panis et Circensis" (Bread and Circus), a Caetano Veloso-penned song that Os Mutantes played on the landmark Tropicália album, which was Brazil's response to the psychedelic sounds introduced by the likes of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Beach Boys.

Another great moment was "On The Rocks", another 80s hit that showcased the guitar talents of Beto Lee (Roberto de Carvalho handled most of the solos in the other songs) in an extended solo that drew a lot of applause from the audience.

An unexpected moment was when Rita introduced "Perto do Fogo" (Close to The Fire), the sole Cazuza-Rita Lee composition, which was written shortly before the late singer/songwriter succumbed to AIDS in 1990.

It was a moving moment - few seemed to remember the song, which was included both in Cazuza's final album, *Burguesia* (Bourgeoisie) and on Rita's 1990 *Rita e Roberto*.

After eighteen songs (she closed with the inevitable "Ovelha Negra" (Black Sheep), her biggest hit), she returned to stage for an extended encore which included the Mutantes' "Balada do Louco" (Madman's Ballad), "Desculpe o Auê" (Sorry For The Mess), both performed solely by Rita and Roberto de Carvalho and the full-band renditions of "Caso Sério" (Serious Case) and "Lança Perfume" (an allusion to a popular Carnaval drug).

Rita and the band were definitely motivated, and she sounded so (I saw her during her 1995 tour in Brazil, and she sounded a little jaded back then).

The band was rock-solid even during the softer moments, and the crowd responded well. During "Doce Vampiro" (Sweet Vampire), Rita just let everyone sing, and the same happened during the aforementioned "Ovelha Negra" and "Desculpe o Auê."

Let's hope that Rita returns again soon - I don't think we deserve to wait another 10 years or so for another visit from Brazil's queen of rock and roll.

Rita Lee
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