

## Loud and fiery X-mas Ball delivers the rock

By CHRIS BRADSHAW

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Thousands turned out to Germain Arena last Wednesday night for alt-rock station 99X's X-mas Ball. It was a four-and-a-half hour high decibel blast featuring glam rockers Black Veil Brides, the British metalcore Asking Alexandria, the unhinged area-favorites Hollywood Undead and rock titans Avenged Sevenfold who returned to southwest Florida for the first time since 2008.

This year's X-mas Ball was a tad heavier than years past and was two things above all; punctual and rib-rattling loud. It kicked off on time, band change-overs were swift and the volume knobs were glued to "11." Throughout the evening, I repeatedly asked others if it was me or if this was the loudest concert of all-time. Many answered with "What?!" That said, sound quality was fine enough: it was a hard rock show, not an evening with Steely Dan.

Black Veil Brides and Asking Alexandria had respectable clusters of devout fans packed against the front barricade for the 7 p.m. start. The two bands created the evening's spark before Hollywood Undead arrived with gasoline.

No equipment caught fire like at Live X back in April, but the debaucherous Undead did bring the heat, radiating its audacious fusion of rock beats, moxie and levity. Go ahead — try to ignore them. They can make you bounce, they can make you laugh and they can make you pray your 10-year-old niece has never heard of them.

While the group's musical progression from its first to second album is clear-cut, Undead has remained uncensored and silly. Funny Man lived up to his nickname when he declared from the stage, "If you like what you hear, we are Hollywood Undead. If you DON'T like what you hear, we are Black Veil Brides!" The comedic jab evoked a ripple of chuckles and reminded us we were all there to have a good time.

Some band performances have more of a rolling start and gradually build to peaks. And that works. Avenged Sevenfold did it another way that works. When the starting gate dropped with its hit song, "Nightmare," it was on. And it was full-throttle until the end of its ninety-minute sonic and fiery riot of a set.

Zacky Vengeance and Synyster Gates' dual guitar leads of demonic poetry overlaid a tight, pummeling rhythm and M. Shadows' barbaric screams while flame blasts reached for the Germain Arena rafters; they did it big and loud.

Shadows lightheartedly dedicated the encore, "Beast and the Harlot," a song about a symbolic woman who is a dwelling for demons, to his wife. The final "KABOOM!" and pyrotechnic fired at 11:36 p.m., signaling the end of another great area rock show and

perhaps the beginning of an area epidemic of impaired hearing.

Chris Bradshaw is a southwest Florida-based concert photographer who loves to shoot the show. He's covered local bands in tiny smoke-filled bars, U2 in a sold out stadium and everything in between, from Jimmy Buffett in Paris to Hellyeah on a cruise ship.



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