

Review: 'Star Wars' concert was a 'force'-ful evening

By ELIZABETH KELLAR

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ESTERO — From the moment we drove into Germain Arena on Thursday night and spotted a parking lot attendant wielding his flashlight as if it were a light saber, we knew “Star Wars’: In Concert” was going to be heavy on the fan frenzy.

That, after all, is part of the appeal of attending an event like this. To be around people like you, people who love all the same “Star Wars” scenes and have all the same “Star Wars” issues, people who don’t look at you oddly when you say solemnly, “Many Bothans died to bring us this information.”

Because, you know, they did. In Episode VI, “Return of the Jedi.” It was a very poignant moment.

, I have probably just outed myself as a complete Star Wars nut, and perhaps incapable of writing an objective review about the concert. But, as a wise Jedi master once remarked, there is no “try” – only “do or do not” – and so in the spirit of Yoda, this appraisal will use the force, have no fear, reject the Dark Side, all those things.

“Star Wars’: In Concert” began touring in January 2009, but its Estero stop Thursday marked its return to the United States and kicked off another, 50-city North American leg of the tour.

It was a multimedia extravaganza. That’s not only the good little geek in me talking: The show strung together clips from all six films on a massive, 100-foot LED screen.

Images from the newer films were predictably amazing – crisp, clean and colorful – but so were those from the earlier films, reinforcing how well they’ve weathered the test of time. Lights and smoke helped stoke fan fervor. And, yes, there were lasers, presumably because it’s “Star Wars” and because “Star Wars” fans trust lasers. Finally, all the scenes were set to live orchestral music of composer John Williams’ “Star Wars” score and choral performances.

The 80-plus orchestra, conducted by newly-hired Maestro Lucas Richman, tours with the show. But the 60 vocalists are tapped for the job in each town where the tour stops. Here, it was the Fort Myers Mastersingers, a 10-year-old vocal chorus. The Mastersingers were selected several weeks ago and didn’t have a chance to rehearse with the orchestra until shortly before the performance.

The songs they were tasked to sing, “Battle of the Heroes” and “Duel of the Fates,” proved to be two of concert’s most dramatic, and the Mastersingers didn’t disappoint.

“Duel of the Fates” is an ominous song, one that’s played in Episodes I, II and III during pivotal battle scenes; in concert, it was used as an opening number to set a mood of deception and doubt swirling around in a galaxy far, far away.

Those conditions ultimately launch the events that become the “Star Wars” saga, explained concert emcee Anthony Daniels, the actor who portrayed beloved protocol droid C-3PO in all six of the “Star Wars” films.

When Daniels walked out onto the stage, the audience applause was thunderous. Somehow, he managed to perfectly combine newscaster gravitas and gossipy silliness as he narrated, telling the Skywalker story as if it happened not to fictional characters a long time ago, but to real people just last week.

Clad in a sleek, black-on-black suit that he periodically popped open to reveal a C-3PO-suggestive gold lamé vest, Daniels occasionally lapsed into the voice of his longtime alter-ego and gleefully sputtered some of C-3PO’s most memorable lines.

Then, he slyly re-buttoned his jacket and returned to his narration, introducing the next set of clips, creating some of the most crowd-pleasing moments of the entire concert.

This crowd was definitely pleased, too. There were times when the two-hour concert seemed to become visually repetitive – even some favorite clips were shown more than once, making me wonder if this was truly an event a non-fan could attend and not become bored. But the music was flawless.

Afterwards, audiences stood and cheered for several minutes, prompting Daniels to return to the stage and say he sensed a “yearning to go back to the Dark Side.” That meant an exciting encore of “The Imperial March,” also known as “Darth Vader’s Theme.”

In fact, that particular Sith Lord made several appearances on Thursday night, as did a multitude of other costumed Star Wars characters. “Star Wars’: In Concert” is also traveling exhibit of movie memorabilia that includes sheet music, costumes and other props.

Han Solo, encased in carbonite, was there, and Storm Troopers stalked the halls, posing for pictures. One attendee remarked that the crush to see the Yoda puppet reminded him of the line at the Louvre to see the “Mona Lisa.”

Yet the best was when Darth Vader swept through the pre-concert crowd. People parted, giving him a wide berth. (He is evil, you know.)

Then, suddenly, an itty-bitty concertgoer dressed as Obi-Wan Kenobi rushed forward and grabbed him by the leg and hugged him.

The force is strong with that one.

