

Spandau Ballet and Alphaville, greatest of the 80s?

 By [Alan Hughes](#)

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I recently had the opportunity to go to see Spandau Ballet and Alphaville at the Grand West Arena. When I arrived, DJs from Heart 104.9 FM were playing great hits from the 1980s and warming up the crowd with humorous banter. They hailed these two bands as being the greatest of the 80s, which seemed a little over the top. Maybe they are the best bands of the 80s who are still making music - and who are prepared to include South Africa in their tour?

As I lived my way through the 80s, I enjoyed some of the hits from these bands, but I would not consider myself a hard-core fan of either. I do have meaningful memories of an Alphaville album, which a cousin gave me on tape as I was leaving for National Service. It helped me through some unpleasant evenings, with my Walkman cranked up loud, to numb out what surrounded me. This nostalgia was probably my strongest reason for wanting to attend the show.

Raunchier rock



Alphaville

Alphaville were the support act, doing a shorter set. Their songs varied from well-known hits with the crowd singing along, to songs nobody seemed to know, to familiar songs that they had revamped and restyled. They came across as more of a rock band than the softer pop sounds I recalled. While I like their pop sound of the 80s, the raunchier rock was more contemporary with some nice guitar and drum work. The sound mixing and quality should have been better, though. I often couldn't make out the lyrics, as the instruments drowned out the singer. We were also subjected to more flashing strobes than was comfortable, and the bass levels got higher and higher as the set continued, until it was distorting unpleasantly with their finale of Forever Young.

Speaking of Forever Young, all the members of both bands seem to have weathered the decades admirably. They were all in good shape, energetic, and looking younger than I expected. All the performers were clearly still first-rate musicians and well rehearsed, creating two tight units.

Overpriced beer in plastic cups



Spandau Ballet

After an interval, for people to stand in queues to buy overpriced beer in plastic cups, Spandau Ballet took to the stage. The show started with a powerful movie flash of the band and, from there, straight into the music. Again it was a mix of well-known old hits and songs which no one had heard, which at times seemed to lose the crowd. The band was apparently reformed after a break of 20 years and are currently on a world tour to promote their new album.

The show was flashy and professional, if rather stagey, and I would have to say, not really my cup of tea. They did one nice, almost acoustic number, with just the singer and guitarist on stage. I enjoyed the lighting techniques and the sound quality seemed better than when Alphaville were on stage. We were also treated to another humorous movie clip of the band, flipping through from their earliest days, to their glory days: all pretty young men with 80s' hairstyles.

Not the liveliest

The crowd was not the liveliest I have seen, but they seemed to enjoy themselves. The seats upstairs were fully booked, and the Golden Circle was full, without being too crushed. The standing room outside the Golden Circle was relatively empty, so

we had room to move about and dance. The organisation at the venue, from parking to doormen to our friendly security guard Frans, was all professional, as you would expect it to be at the Arena.

ABOUT ALAN HUGHES

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