



McCartney at Wembley . . . 'Beyond the thumbs-up, there is more to it than all that'

PHOTOGRAPH: ALLAN TITMUS

It was twenty years ago today . . .

Peter Aspden at Wembley Arena

ONE of the most poignant moments in the history of the Beatles was the image of Paul McCartney in *Let It Be*, bearded, jaded and isolated, trying to talk his colleagues on to the road again. The response — Lennon's glazed indifference and Harrison's snapping — was as painful as it was revealing. This was not a group of mates having a meaningless tiff.

Twenty years on there can be no more contrasting image than Macca furiously swapping Hicks with his new muckers in the triple guitar coda to *Abbey Road*, striking up the Hamburg poses, tossing his hair and winking at the front rows. This perhaps was what he wanted all

along; no hysteria, no lawyers, just a band on the run.

It was a strong conclusion to an evening which took time to warm up. McCartney managed to stage one of the most anti-climactic openings in pop history when the breezy nostalgia of *Richard and Lester's* warm-up film, an effective appetiser, was followed by a limp rendition of the mediocre *Figure Of Eight* from the new album.

It was, knowing McCartney, a wilful piece of mischief. He seemed to acknowledge as much himself as, an hour into the show, he kicked the band into a higher gear with a driving *Sergeant Pepper-Good Day Sunshine-Can't Buy Me Love* sequence which finally roused a melow verging on comatose audience on to its feet.

His mildly cheeky affability clearly struck a chord with his *Thirtyfortysometh-*

ing admirers; yet it is his very effortlessness that too often works against him. He may have some of the greatest pop tunes ever written, but that's no excuse to throw them away. *Lead Me To Your Door*, from *The Long And Winding Road*, was delivered with all the passion of a double-glazing salesman.

His younger followers, and there weren't many, might have found some of the socio-political comment puzzling (*Ebony And Ivory* dedicated to a visiting East German family, *Martin Luther King's "Free At Last"* piped over during *Fool On The Hill*), but all responded to his demand for a cleaner world in the prelude to *Let It Be*.

Unfortunately this particular part of the world was so clean that there weren't enough lighters to give the song the reception which megastar tradition demands.

By the end his account was just about in credit thanks to a surprisingly jaunty *Coming Up*, an urgent *Back In The USSR* and a pyrotechnical *Live And Let Die* (one of the few times the sophisticated lighting system came together with the music).

Hey Jude was almost moving until he asked different parts of the audience in turn to join in the chorus. The song really is classier than that. The encore of *Yesterday*, *Get Back*, *Golden Slumbers* was blissful, but only if you closed your eyes as requested.

A cheery wave and he was off, leaving us to wrestle with his comments in the free 100-page concert programme: "Beyond the thumbs-up, there is more to it than all that. Which I know, because I lived it."

Yes, but shouldn't that come across in the music?

Aspden on McCartney

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