

## The Machine

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**by Greg Jackson**



On this wet, cold central NY evening, Pink Floyd fans by the hundreds weathered the storm to see The Machine, America's premier and longest standing tribute to the legendary group. Guitarist/vocalist Joe Pascarell and co-founding member Todd Cohen on drums, Scott Chasolen on keys and vocals and Ryan Ball on bass/12 string acoustic and vocals continued the celebration of their 20th year as a band. This being my first TM show, I highly anticipated this performance and with a half dozen The Australian Pink Floyd Show shows, one The Pink Floyd Experience show and dozens of Childhood's End shows under my belt, it would be difficult to retain my objectivity. Many thanks to Mr. Mike Chemotti from IslandFest Productions (also a promoter of Childhood's End) and Road Manager/FOH Engineer Randy Taber for arranging passes for my wife Sandra (who has provided the fabulous pictures) and I, as well as getting us a few minutes with the band after the show. This insight would prove invaluable in writing this review/interview. Showing their years of playing together The Machine operates very much like one, each player knows just where the other is going and they're not afraid to let it loose and jam much as The Floyd would in their earlier days. Taking their own path with tonality seems to be a trademark of the band, hitting on the general themes while reading each one in their own way. Some tribute bands strive for a "note for note" approach and others just seem to go through the motions, not quite able to "get in the zone". The Machine has a very individual take, leaning toward jam band roots rather than a stoic replication, their heart-felt style is one I haven't experienced before and one I must say clashes with my own sensibilities. I'm not sure if it was the sound mix or the band's settings, but at times the individual parts seemed lost and under-stated, then they'd drift back to prominence. The pacing of the sets and individual song placement within them made for quick changes in feel and mood, providing a dynamic which sometimes seemed intentional and other times not. Hearing "You're the best singing audience we've ever had!" from Joe during "Wish You Were Here" left me feeling it was strangely played as the audience cheered their approval.

The Machine has been together for over 20 years and 2000 shows, they've toured across Central and North America, Europe and Asia. Their legacy and fan base allows them a comfortable position on stage where they bring their own flavor and delivery to the Floyd catalog. This night provided a

nice cross section from older Barrett era, "Lucifer Sam", to the band's final studio album with "High Hopes" from The Division Bell. They were received enthusiastically as they breezed through the somewhat short first set with surprisingly minimal use of their large video screen, although the video for SOY-CD 1-5 was very cool and the classic heartbeat opening to Breathe was enhanced in a very nice way. Billed as being accompanied by The Intergalactic Light Show, I was excited to be blown away visually as well as musically, but what started as a standard (among tributes) lighting scene for Shine On You Crazy Diamond pts. 1-5 turned into a repetitive, yet attractive light show. One of the musicians from the opening act told me that in speaking to one of the TM crew guys, they had told him it was one of their small light shows. Musically one expects a tribute band to stay pretty "close to the box", there is a very slippery slope associated with making another's music your own. I don't make it a practice to pick apart songs individually and won't start here. As I've written previously about other tribute bands, the bottom line is the crowd's reaction. The Machine's impact on their audience this night was evident as they roared their approval at the end and the beginning of each song.

Speaking with Todd after the show I commented on just that, saying it's really all that matters, to which he whole-heartedly agreed. "We love what we do, it's an honor to play this music night after night and the reaction is the biggest reward", he said. "We do what we do the way we do it and don't really make a fuss over what anyone besides the audience thinks", responding to my question about other tribute bands and their individual approaches to presentation. I appreciate this because I have the same mind-set, but we differ in respect to the presentation of the music in general. After a brief hello with Ryan, Todd took us to meet Joe who was sitting in the front row of seats saying goodnight to some fans. I was anxious to hear his thoughts on several questions and attempted to be straight-forward while filtering through what I perceived as a smoke-screen of humor masking the answers to them. From Todd's introduction and light hearted warning to, "Be careful, he manages another Floyd tribute." to which Joe replied, "Which one? Do we know them?" and "Who's taking a piece of my pie?" (playing off a lyric from "Money") he added a wink and a smile, saying, "I'm being facetious, really." I remarked that it is a very big pie and my approach is that there's plenty for everyone. I asked where he felt their take on the music came from and he replied, "Sometimes I think we sound just like them (Pink Floyd), but overall we bring our own style to it. Everybody does it differently and we do to, when someone else has done it for 21 years they can come and talk to me about it." Laughing again to maintain the air of question it seemed and Todd's subtle reactions reinforced my thoughts. While we had only a few minutes, Todd's candor was refreshing and open, much like I've experienced with many other tribute band members that I've met over the years. We agreed that there is room for and plenty of fans for everyone, but there seems to be a huge growth in the Pink Floyd tribute area. It's my opinion that it's stunning what countless tributes put out there thinking (and saying) they're the best, ultimate, perfect or "insert your own adjectives here", tribute to Pink Floyd. While they can get some of the sounds and visuals right, they most often fail in either their inability to be accurate enough with their technical skills or just can't cut it vocally. The elegance and anger of The Floyd requires a subtle touch at times, then a dramatic, dynamic feel at others. Defining those parameters is the strength or weakness of every tribute band playing around

the world today, yet despite different ways of getting the job done, some just have a certain way with the crowd. The Machine exemplifies this, lending their own hearts and souls to the music they hold in such great regard. It's always a fascination to me how people can spend so much time together and not want to kill each other on occasion or as in other bands, just not like or speak to each other off stage. "How do you guys do it?", I asked. Todd replied, "We don't!", I wasn't surprised.

The Machine's reputation precedes them, their longevity and devotion to the art has built them a rabid and well deserved fan base. Much like an athlete who has a microphone placed in his face by a stranger right after a game, individual musicians will react much the same way, some open, some guarded, some defensive. I was left feeling their genuine respect for their craft and a guarded position when comparing themselves to others in the business. Completely understandable considering the large stature of the band and the amount of others out there trying to take it from them. Judging by the audience's reaction Saturday night I highly doubt Joe and the gang have anything to be concerned about. It was an enlightening experience for me and I thank each member of the band for that. You can learn more about The Machine at their website [www.themachinelive.com](http://www.themachinelive.com).

#### Set 1

Shine On You Crazy Diamond 1-5

Breathe

Time/Breathe

Sorrow

Pigs On the Wing

Dogs

On the Turning Away

#### Set 2

In the Flesh?

The Thin Ice

Brick 1

Happiest Days Of Our Lives

Brick 2

High Hopes

Pigs

Fletcher Memorial Home

Lucifer Sam

Money

Wish You Were Here

Run Like Hell

#### Encores

Have a Cigar

Comfortably Numb