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Sade Opens Tour With Sultry Baltimore Show

For her first live shows in nearly 10 years, Sade mixes classics with new songs

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PHOTO: Kevin Mazur/WireImage

Sade performs at 1st Mariner Arena on June 16, 2011 in Baltimore, Maryland.

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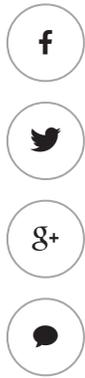
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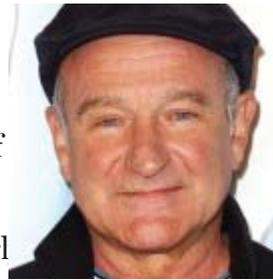
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BY EVAN SERPICK | June 17, 2011



Last night, after Sade had finished slinking around the stage during an amped-up version of "Soldier of Love" – the first song in the first concert of her first North American tour in nearly 10 years – the sold-out crowd at Baltimore's 1st Mariner's Arena let her know how much they missed her. For several minutes, the cheers went on, increasing in intensity every time the singer tried to start talking, pushing her back into a silent grin.

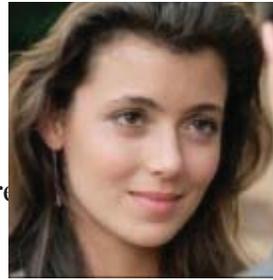
"It's a beautiful thing – the best thing – to be here with you," she said, once things finally settled down. "You kept the torch burning for all this time."



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In many ways, it seemed that

little had changed. When the British-Nigerian singer came onstage, her hair was in the familiar tight ponytail, augmented by bright red lipstick, hoop earrings and a sheer black turtleneck. And that luxurious, smoky voice – the one that earned Sade (the singer, also the name of the band) a reputation as an aural aphrodisiac, the female counterpart to Barry White – is as glorious as ever.

After opening with the hit single from the band's 2010 album, also called Soldier of Love, Sade announced that she wanted to take things "all the way back to the beginning," and launched into "Your Love is King," the jazzy sax-fueled single from their debut album, 1984's Diamond Life.

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The set continued to jump around among the band's six albums, maintaining a flow that highlighted their well-honed formula of diverse, syncopated percussion, jazzy instrumentation and hard-hitting, passionate lyrics, all held together by that one-in-a-million voice. Gritty, squawking guitars added some welcome bite to tunes like "Love is Found" and "Paradise."

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minimalist but elegant set design matched the singer's graceful, deliberate stage movements. A massive video screen projected videos for each song that acclaimed producer Sophie Muller created for the tour. The lead-up to "Smooth Operator," which came fairly early in the set, included a highly stylized, narrated noir video that culminated in the singer emerging in an open-collared shirt and gangster vest.

Although several of the videos featured the singer wearing her hair down, it still came as a pleasant surprise when she emerged after a second wardrobe change wearing a white gown with her hair hanging down to her shoulders. It provided welcome intimacy for the last third of the set, which included some of the band's biggest hits, including "Sweetest Taboo," "No Ordinary Love" and "By Your Side."

For the encore, the band played "Cherish the Day," a minor hit from 1992's Love Deluxe – which nonetheless felt like an appropriate closer for the mostly middle-aged fans who had waited so long for the day when Sade would play a show like this again.

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Opener John Legend played an appropriately sophisticated set that highlighted his piano prowess, booming baritone, and passionate song about love and loss (sound familiar?). He closed with "Ordinary People," the extraordinary track from Legend's debut album *Get Lifted*. For a moment, as the crowd sang along to every word, it almost seemed that Legend was the main attraction, but the ovation Sade received when she came onstage made it clear who people had come to see.

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