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BENEFIT

A Rousing Rock Show for a Wounded City

By JAYSON BLAIR

A virtual "Who's Who" of the entertainment industry took the stage last night at Madison Square Garden for the "Concert for New York," a benefit to raise money to rebuild Lower Manhattan and help relatives of the victims of the Sept. 11 attack.

The benefit was expected to be the most successful charity event in history, surpassing last month's $125 million post-attack telethon.

It had light and serious moments.

The crowd cheered as Bon Jovi sang "Dead Or Alive," one of his hit songs from the 1980's and a phrase that President Bush has used in reference to the suspected mastermind of the Sept. 11 attack, Osama bin Laden. Mick Jagger used a vulgar term to explain why it was best not to get into a fight with New York.

A short film by Woody Allen included jokes envisioning the Port Authority attempting to move out of New York and Mayor Giuliani getting a house on Fire Island with his rival the Rev. Al Sharpton. It also had a man complaining that the police had taken his drugs to fight anthrax and that Starbucks had opened a coffee shop in Afghanistan.

There were somber segments as well, as when Gov. George E. Pataki praised rescue workers and honored the dead.

"Since that tragic moment on Sept. 11, our nation has been exposed to evil, an unprecedented evil that was supposed to paralyze America," Governor Pataki said. "We haven't been. We are stronger as a people and a country."

He added: "Fear provoked by evil is destined to always fall when confronted by courage in the face of terror."

Tickets for the show cost between $250 and $1,000 each, and a telephone number for donations ran across the screen as the show was broadcast on VH1. Musical performers included Paul McCartney, The Who, Bon Jovi, Bono and Edge of U2, David Bowie, Elton John, Destiny's Child, the Backstreet Boys, Mr. Jagger, John Mellencamp, Eric Clapton, Billy Joel, James Taylor, Melissa Etheridge, Macy Gray, Marc Anthony, Five For Fighting, Goo Goo Dolls and Jay-Z. Janet Jackson performed through a remote satellite connection from Pittsburgh.

An equally impressive list of Hollywood stars appeared, from Spike Lee to Harrison Ford.

Guests included more than 5,000 firefighters, police officers and other rescue workers. They, in fact, received more cheers than any of the performers, who often made jokes as they introduced others.

Mr. Bowie kicked off the benefit with an emotional rendition of Paul Simon's "America" and then followed it with "Heroes."

Just as crowds have returned to the observation deck of the Empire State Building, people were clamoring to get into the Garden last night. Those angling to find scalpers, some of whom were selling $250 tickets for $1,000, were young and old, all shades of color and of various backgrounds.

But most who were looking for scalped tickets were sorely disappointed.

Some of the show's levity was seen as a sign of how much things have changed since Sept. 11.



Nancy Siesel/The New York Times

Rescue workers received more cheers than even Billy Joel.

Just a little more than a month ago, in the initial days after the attack, Madison Square Garden was the subject of speculation about a possible terrorist attack and it was evacuated more than once because of bomb threats.

But the crowd last night did not seem at the least bit tense.

"I just want to say something to all the celebrities who have stayed away from New York," Howard Stern, the comedian and radio talk show host, said at one interlude during the concert. "I say shame on you. Come back to New York."

As Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani took the stage, he said, "Thank you'," as the crowd chanted "Rudy, Rudy."

"Since the attacks of Sept. 11, Americans and New Yorkers have united as never before," Mr. Giuliani said.

He added, "Our enemies should not mistake the fact that even as they see us cry and mourn for those who are lost, we are stronger and tougher, and ready to defend ourselves as never before."

During another memorable moment, former President Bill Clinton, holding the hat of Deputy Fire Chief Ray Downey, who helped rescuers at the Oklahoma City bombing and died at the World Trade Center, remarked on how Mr. bin Laden and his advisers are reputed to watch Americans on television.

"I hope they saw this tonight," Mr. Clinton said. "Because they thought America was about money and power, and that if they took down the World Trade Center we would collapse."

"But we are not about mountains of money and towers of steel. But we are about mountains of courage and hearts of steel."

He then introduced James Taylor, who sang his 1970's hit "Fire and Rain," with its mournful lyrics that Mr. Taylor has said are about the death of a friend, desperation in trying to get through a tough time, and recuperation.

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