

Burruss jams to Matisyahu, SOJA

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There is a flash of pink and blue on the stage of Burruss Auditorium, as an oddly colored dawn creeps its way up behind a hilly city. Above the hill, in large white block letters is the word "MATISYAHU." It is 9:21 p.m. on Nov. 4 and Matisyahu has just let the large black curtain which is hiding this alternative sunrise drop, much to the pleasure of many students in the audience. Although Matisyahu and his band have been playing for a little under 20 minutes, the real show is just beginning.

The night kicked off at 7:33 p.m. when the seven members of the opening act SOJA straggled onto the stage and began their hour-long set. It would be the first of two shows that night for the band; shortly after wrapping up its set at Burruss, it moved all of its equipment for a follow-up performance at The Lantern.

The singing was split between guitarist Jacob Hemphill and bassist Bob "Bobby Lee" Jefferson. During Jefferson's moments, whose facial hair looks like two, long Arby's curly fries, he bombastically unloaded line after line of reggae-rap while his fingers danced over a five-string bass.

The band began with slower, reggae-based songs. However by mid-set, Hemphill was continually moving to one side of the microphone or the other, waiting for his moment to let another distorted guitar solo fly.

The members of the first act could not ignore the timing of the performance on Election Day.

"It's really a big day today," Hemphill said to the masses at Burruss, while wearing a shirt that had a mock D.C. license plate which read "OBAMA." "Did everybody do what they're supposed to?"

In between Hemphill and Jefferson stood keyboardist Patrick O'Shea. Behind him sat a few large bass amps that belonged to the bassist of Matisyahu. The word "VOTE" was written on them in a fashion similar to the Love Sculpture in New York City.

At the end of its set, the band took a bow and thanked the crowd. After a brief intermission, Matisyahu's band took the stage at 9:05 p.m. and began to jam. A few minutes into this, the rapper-singer himself sprung onto the stage and launched into the first song of the performance.

Despite Matisyahu's jaunty skip as he glided around the stage, his face was austere and serious as he sang in the beginning of his set. By the

time the opening riffs of "Jerusalem" could be heard rippling out of the many speakers, a smile had cracked across his face as the audience recognized the tune and cheered ferociously. It was at this point that Matisyahu hit his rhythm, and allowed more smiles to come through. His dancing became more exuberant, and sometimes his gliding skip was interchanged with wide-armed spins.

"I love his style," said Alexandra Collado, a junior at Virginia Tech. "I love his voice. It's just so soothing and he seems very comfortable on stage. He really feels his performances, which is really cool."

Matisyahu and his band played new songs at the show, many of which came off of its newly released EP, "Shattered." The tone of the band was different from its past reggae-based sound. Instead, the band's sound at Burruss was harder. Matisyahu opted to step out of the spotlight at times in order to let many of his band mates have a few minutes of solo.

Although the band had many energetic songs, it occasionally let the beat drop to a more mellow pace. In these moments, Matisyahu sometimes stood at the front of the stage, eyes closed in a meditative gesture, swaying back and forth as if he was listening intently to some bodiless voice whispering the lyrics into his ear.

"Perfect," David Clark, a psychology major from Radford, said about Matisyahu's performance. "There couldn't be a better way. The way he beatboxes, the way he just closes his eyes and just gets into his own -- it's pretty amazing."

Matisyahu's beatboxing skills proved to be another crowd pleaser during the show. Taking his voice and turning it into a multi-instrumental machine, he beatboxed and jammed with his band twice during the show for extended periods of time. At one point, in between the sounds put forth by Matisyahu (which included whooshing and robot sounds), the guitarist began to sample the hook from Sir-Mix-A-Lot's "Jump On It."

Another eventful moment in the show occurred when the bassist experienced some problems with his instrument, just as the band was breaking open the beginning riffs of "Youth." On the spot, Matisyahu redirected the music and started another bout of beatboxing. This would be the first of two times the riff would be heard, but the song was not played out in its entirety that night.

"He played the intro," said Arianna Appleton, a sophomore at Tech who was thrown off by Matisyahu's teasing. "And I'd get all excited and then he'd be like 'rewind' and play some other stuff."

Although not all the fans got exactly what they wanted, for fans like Collado, the chance to see SOJA and Matisyahu was well worth any price. This may include the 8 a.m. exam she plans to be studying for up until she takes it.

"It was definitely worth having to stay up all night to study for my 8 a.m. afterward," Collado said after Matisyahu's set ended just before 10:30 p.m.