

## Milwau(I)kee and Chicago APLP Show Reviews, May 2015

I haven't attended an APLP show since joining Facebook. If you've been on the Roadkill mailing list, you've seen these missives before. I hesitated posting it on one of the AP(P)-related groups I belong to since I make a lot of references to material I've covered over the years on Roadkill. But, if any of you who moderate those groups feel it's appropriate to share, knock yourselves out. Here goes:

This marks the 20th year that Sandra and I have been attending APLP shows. For fifteen of those years, I've written a crapton of Milwau(I)kee and Chicago reviews (9 and 5 respectively). It seems we've spent most of this portion of our lives here in Flyover Country going to APLP shows. That being said, it's been 3 months shy of 5 years since we last saw an APLP show (look in the Sept 2010 archives for that Experience Review); that last show was also at the Pabst. Me, Sandra Holder and Andy Burnett tried to make our schedules work in 2014 when Alan did this exact same twosome tour (Pabst and Arcada) but just couldn't swing it. This year we made sure our collective calendars were cleared.

We drove Wednesday to Andy's since that broke up the drive. It's one thing going straight thru to one of the Chicago exurbs like St Charles but we're getting too old for the extra 2 hours it takes (barring Chicago traffic) to get to the Land of Cheese(heads). We got to meet his new cat, I got to see two sparrows chase a squirrel between trees and generally have a relaxing time before heading north. Teh Googlez said it would take 3.5 hours without traffic to get to Milwau(I)kee but we'll never know how accurate that was since traffic bedeviled us most of the way adding about an hour to the drive.

As in 2010, we stayed downtown at the Pfister. Me and Andy headed down to the bar for a couple of TABs while Sandra rested and freshened up. The bar had bar snacks of the usual salty, carbohydrate variety and this jogged Andy's memory about a conversation he had, he thought with Alan, back in 1998 about how unhygienic those things were, ie., some study showed that they were literally covered with pee because men don't wash their hands after certain relieving functions. After 19 years of traveling with Projectronics's laconic bass player, we've clearly run out of things to talk about so this is how we wile away the time at a bar. We still ate bar snacks because we like to live dangerously. Once Sandra appeared, we were ready for the grueling 5 minute walk to the Pabst.

Looking back on my previous reviews, I always sing the praises of downtown Milwau(I)kee. That remains true. It's very bike friendly, there's food and drink places everywhere, you can walk to anywhere, the trails are extensive and who knows, with global warming, in 20 years it could be the new Florida! It's quite hard when you don't allow for a lot of time to just explore or sit for a drink, etc. It's one attraction of Alan frequently playing the city, particularly the Pabst since you don't have to deal with transportation to and from the casino.

Back in 2010 after seeing APLP ver 3.0 for the first time at the Pabst, I remarked that they were a "work in progress". Five years onward I expected to see some progress, this time with APLP ver 3.1 (with the addition of Dan Tracey on guitars and vocals; head to Alan Parsons's site for the full band line up). We sat in on sound check and the first thing we noted were the vocals. With Dan, they now utilize 5 lead vocalists (Alan, Dan, Alastair Greene, Todd Cooper, and Pj Olsson) plus Manny Focarazzo, Guy Erez and Danny Thompson sing backing vocals. They ran thru a couple of pieces a capella and we then realized that yup, they've been working extensively on vocals and it showed.

Milwau(l)kee Set List (lead vocalist indicated):

Luciferama  
Damned If I Do (Peej)  
Don't Answer me (Alan)  
Breakdown/Raven (Todd/Peej)  
Time (Peej)  
IWWTBLY (Alastair)  
Days Are Numbers (Dan)  
Psychobabble (Todd)

TOAFC Suite  
TOAFC 1 (Peej)  
Snake Eyes (Peej)  
Ace Of Swords  
Nothing Left To Lose (Alan)  
TOAFC 2 (Peej)

Do You Live At All (Peej)  
Limelight (Todd)  
In The Real World (Dan)  
Old And Wise (Peej)  
Prime Time (Alastair)  
Sirius/EITS (Alan)

Encore:  
Don't Let It Show (Peej)  
Games People Play (Alan/Peej)

With the proliferation of cell phone video, you can go to YouTube and type in, for example:

alan parsons games people play live

and get a full idea of what APLP ver 3.1 sounds like. That search term brought up a nice video from the Rome show earlier this year.

That video also gives you a sense of the visual impact of 5 people fronting the stage with three behind them on risers. When Todd did lead vocals, he'd move over to center stage with his wireless mic. Aside from Peej, he did the most moving around because of lead vocal duties and sax playing. Of course Peej moved around. ;)

My first real tingle moment was Alan's "Nevermore" at the end of Breakdown/Raven. The audience's first roaring reaction was before/during/after IWWTBLY. Literally as soon as the first keyboard note hits, everybody in the audience knows the song. And they loved Guy's 70s, wah-wah, drippy water sounding bass solo.

"Do You Live At All" (the nominal "B" side from "Fragile") showcased the band's vocal skills, I really liked it; Peej is nominal lead but it's very much a group effort. Originally I wondered why Alan had brought on

an 8th member who was also another lead guitarist, was he turning this into the Marshal Tucker Band Live Project with all those guitars? Heh heh, turns out he pulled in an impressive lead vocalist in Dan and one who's guitar work onstage is closer to the originals than what we've heard from first Godfrey and now Alastair. Dan's lead vocals were perfect for the two songs. Some folks over the years bemoan the fact that Alan's no longer up there with any of the "original" Project members. However, APLP ver 1.x never matched the vocal impressiveness of 2.x and 3.x and I've found over the years that really makes or breaks the overall value of the live set. "Nothing Left To Lose" is interesting in that Alastair plays repeats of the intro riff on acoustic guitar, then Alan comes in when he's ready to sing. I also know from doing it live that it's a tricky little song to sing and it's a pretty naked singing experience given it's just the vocalist and Alastair on guitar.

The entire TOAFC suite sans the Gold Bug elicited an audience reaction similar to what I remember those few times the band's done "Silence and I" live, ie blown away. Dammit Alan, I don't care what you or Eric thought, Gold Bug is part of the suite. :) I say that every time I can and I'm sure by this point Alan's reaction is "I see your lips move but all I hear is blah, blah, blah".

One thing hasn't changed in all these years: Peej doing Don't Let It Show. In fact, I thought Peej's lead vocals were even better than I remember them, he just nailed "Time" even more than he typically has done. But as I've always said, DLIS alone is worth the price of admission and that again proved true.

Most of the song arrangements haven't changed over the years but they have extended some instrumental portions of a few songs (as was done on "Nothing Left To Lose") although now I can't remember which ones.

Looking back on my previous reviews, particularly from 2009-2010, one thing gets more impressive with time (other than Peej's voice): Manny's keyboard solos. "Primetime" is no longer a call and response type of part or even just a rhythm section backing the piano, it's nothing but Manny. He said after the show that he couldn't find the groove he typically looks for during that segment but damned if I could tell.

The interlude in "Psychobabble" is also different being less guitar driven and more keyboardey-effects. Todd does quite a bit of nifty noodling on the sax during this. The result is a bit more low key than before but still great to watch/hear.

That leads into the saxophone. I remember in 1996-99 how we missed the sax from the 1995 tour, thus when Ian played a couple of solos, it was like manna from heaven. But I never missed the sax with ver 2.x since the way they arranged the songs live, we typically got nifty keyboards or wailing guitar. Now that the sax is back it's like "so this is what's been missing, again, all these years." Plus, on at least one song, Todd plays some backing sax where horns would have been on the album. Now if they'd just play the "Gold Bug"...

Alan took a moment as part of an introduction to "Limelight" to acknowledge Eric much like he did here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9ygfZcSYWQ>

It was a nice moment. The irony is that years ago when Ian was at FanFest, somebody asked him about some of the obvious references in Eric's Project material in the 80s to his relationship with Alan, fame, etc. Ian said something to the effect of how that was all lost on Alan at the time. At the show it was a poignant moment.

Alan also acknowledged the three generations of Olssons in the audience as Peej's parents came down from Houghton and his son was with him.

The Pabst has some interesting acoustics. Ross Pallone, the FoH sound guy, commented on how dead/flat (I think that's the phrase he used) the sound was back under the balcony where the sound board is located. That jogged a memory from a previous Pabst show where we also sat on the floor but back in something like Row X and well under the balcony. The sound there was flat and nothing could be done about it. This time we sat up in the balcony, a first for us. The sound gets far more trebly the higher up you sit. If you're in the third level balcony, it's really trebly. Nonetheless, from our seats off to one side on the second level, sound was pretty good.

Alastair still had problems. His lead vocals disappeared entirely during the first verse of Prime Time. The backing vocals at times seemed to overwhelm his lead vocals while at the same time, some of the nuance of the backing vocals, regardless of song, wasn't what it was during sound check. I attribute that in part to where we were in sound check (center-ish about 12 rows back—I'm beginning to think that that's the Pabst's proverbial sweet spot) as opposed to 5 rows back from the rail on the balcony off to one side.

Overall, a really good show. No Concert Fooles although I did had one guy in the beer line prior to the show back into me but the nice lady behind the bar refilled my partially spilled beer. That mitigated the dirty look I was giving the guy. Pabst audiences tend to be a bit lower key than others, I've always said that's cuz the place is so comfy. This was no exception. Responsive crowd but not overly so. Regardless, this for us was a long overdue hour and 50 minutes of the Live Project.

Aftershow was full of people but it wasn't a mob scene. This was helped by the lounge area downstairs at the Pabst. It's where aftershow was held in 2010. It's nice in that the musicians and crew have dressing rooms to be in but everybody else can mill about and not feel pressed. We got to talk with Martin St John (lights), Peej's mom (a hoot and a half) and me and Andy not only got to meet Guy for more than 5 minutes (as in 2010) but had a really nice chat with him. He's scoring for two ABC kids shows (they're somewhat educational). He also talked about the recording process for "Do You Live At All." They did it in two takes with almost no cutting/pasting or adding in parts recorded elsewhere. He said it was just two tracks on ProTools. Me and Andy chuckled because we record exactly as Guy was describing how they didn't do it on that particular song.

At some point Alan asked Andy, me and Sandra what song they should cut out for the next show. After no more than a nano-second pause, Andy says "we're the last persons you should ask that, you need to add songs", then in unison the three of us said "like THE GOLD BUG!" Alan chuckled, then said they'd probably drop Psychobabble which they did.

Next day it was off to Chicago, er, St Charles. We literally drove past Robert J. Noles's old place in Carol Stream and remarked how it used to be on the Chicago exurban frontier. Not anymore. The bonus is that we skirted Chicago via the toll roads and thus, didn't get snagged in any massive traffic backups. We were meeting Julie Landborg Jahn and Alan Girton (towing along what turned out to be his boss) at the hotel, then Steve Ralph and Frank Miller later at a place across the street from the venue. Julie beat us all to the hotel, then we showed up, then Alan maybe 45 minutes, and many texts and cell phone calls to Alan, later.

We found out that Alan G's boss, John, was a big Project fan but this was his first time seeing them live. Turns out Alan G's only live experience was in 98 when they opened for Yes and even that was screwed up. His sister-in-law caused them to be late so as he put it "I've seen maybe 0.65 of a Live Project show." I then made some comment about how it's amazing that said sister-in-law wasn't simply left behind and that dovetailed briefly into Alan's marriage dynamic which then led to another round of TABs. And so goes an APLP pre-show!

Note to myself: in the future, don't schedule a pre-show gathering 4 hours before show time. It makes it harder for people to pace themselves if you know what I mean. Julie wasn't helped in this regard as the first two TABs she wanted the pub didn't have so what she did order turned out to be, in the words of Andy, the "fish bowl of booze". It was in a huge glass, Julie said it wasn't very good but very strong. My idea was that with a slew of us getting together (the head count with us, Steve's party and Frank's party), we'd have 12 people there, thus, lots of pre-show time meant we'd never be rushed. Steve and crew didn't show up until around 6-ish and, big bummer here, Frank texted me saying he was delayed and it turned out he never did make it. Frank, I still don't believe you exist. :)

So we had a lot more time on our hands than usual which made pacing a bit harder to accomplish. Nonetheless, we persevered (some better than others) until doors opened at 7pm. The aftershow wrist bands (typical paper thingies unlike the very nice passes that featured Jill Singletary's "Card" logo which we had at the Pabst—that should have told me right there what the "Arcada experience" was to be) were all under my name so I gathered them up, doled them out to the six of us actually inside the Arcada, then headed back across the street to Steve's crew. Here I am trying to not be obvious with the damn things because all it does is attract everybody who either wants to buy one or bugs you into giving them one as if you have freebies to hand out at random. Sure enough, one guy asked to buy one and another guy recognized me from previous shows and asked how to get one. Ah, the traffic light just turned, gotta go! Once delivered to Steve and crew, I crossed back over to lean on the lamp post in front of the Arcada to wait on Frank. He still wasn't sure about his ETA, I just knew to look for a guy in a black polo shirt. The result was me following at least half a dozen guys around calling "Frank? Frank?" I'd then circle back to the lamppost out front.

At which point Alastair comes up the street. He walks up to me, I lean toward him, pull out the remaining two passes and say "Can I interest you in a backstage pass?" He laughs and replied "I can't afford em." He then went around to the stage door and I made my way back inside. Since Sandra and I didn't actually have aftershow passes, we used the two for Frank!

Now some comments on the Arcada: it's a dump. Am I being unfair? According to this article, possibly: <http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20130820/news/708209950/>

However, if you go here:

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/arcada-theatre-saint-charles>

and scroll down to a review by Leslie S, that pretty much sums up the place.

Another:

[http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g36648-d3700287-Reviews-Arcada\\_Theatre-Saint\\_Charles\\_Illinois.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g36648-d3700287-Reviews-Arcada_Theatre-Saint_Charles_Illinois.html#REVIEWS)

is even less kind. Both are accurate. Why all these 4 and 5 star reviews of the place can be found on Yelp and TripAdvisor are beyond me. That being said, they've been very successful at booking a nonstop

stream of acts so something must be working. Oh, and the one brother who is the “face” of the place, he and Manny could pass as brothers.

A 940-seat venue with bathrooms sized for a tiny coffee shop. There was a long, narrow hallway (a motif as it turned out) with merch, some concessions (\$7.50 Blue Moon beers in cups!) leading up to where the ticket window was and where they actually took tickets. Once inside, there was another narrow aisle between the entrance, a small bar and the actual theater. The upstairs wasn't any better in terms of size. Back on the floor, the first 10 rows of seats had been removed and replaced with your standard, banquet chairs touching side to side. To quote one online review “it's more comfortable flying coach”.

The men's toidy downstairs consisted of one stall and two urinals. I believe the upstairs bathroom (which I could never find) was the same. Sandra reported the ladies toidy was 2 stalls. Assuming the same was upstairs, it's easy to see why there was an intermission...which also served the purpose of promoting future shows, they held a drawing for something, etc. The big upside to that was that Julie's name was selected. So the owner had her down front, she got a pair of tickets (which she in turn gave away to one of the lucky few women to get into a bathroom) and we all had a great time in an otherwise, warm, humid intermission.

We were about six rows back from the stage. Amazingly, two of Steve Ralph's tickets were next to us so six of us were next to each other with the rest scattered on the floor. Sitting next to Steve, I had a great moment when the main part of “Old and Wise” ends. He says something to me about that being the end of the song. I was mum, then Todd comes out 3 seconds later to start the sax solo and Steve's reaction was priceless!

Back to the show, or to paraphrase the above TripAdvisor review “disappointed in venue but not Alan Parsons”. Actually, lemme give the Arcada credit, the sound system was good. We have a similar type “dump” music venue near us, the Blue Note in Columbia MO. While it has a far more spacious interior (but still no bathrooms to speak of) and a much better bar, its sound system is awful and when push comes to shove, I'm going to the venue with the better sound system. So, in terms of simply listening to the show it was great. We were close enough to get the emotion that is Peej singing but back far enough so that it sounded good.

The audience was also more “up” than the night before. That too was probably a selling point of the venue, can't be too comfy at the Arcada that's for sure so might as well channel some energy into the show. The band was also tighter than the night before. This was particularly true for the TOAFC suite. And if I thought Manny couldn't do a Prime Time piano solo any better, he did. He inserted a little bit of Limelight into it and said after the show how he would like to do one of those solos and turn it into nothing but a fast medley of Project songs. But he also talked about how he tries to duplicate what he does at home when he's just sort of “drifting” on the piano.

First tingle moment of the show was the first chorus of “Time”. Peej got a standing ovation at that point and again after the song was over. The audience reaction to the TOAFC suite was impressive. Talking to Alan G's boss John afterwards, it was the first time he'd heard it (he'd never heard TOAFC) and was amazed. As was Alan G. Interestingly, the one person who's not sold on the TOAFC suite live is Sandra. She feels it's much like “Silence and I” live in that you can't really do justice to it without an orchestra.

Alastair's vocals still seemed low in the mix during his leads and during the second half of "Games People Play", his guitar dropped out entirely. Other than that, as I mentioned, everything sounded really good and the crowd had a \*very\* good time. Only one Concert Foole to speak of: the Piercing Whistle Woman who was, of course, right behind me. I think she was at aftershow as well. For perhaps the first half of the show, she'd let out one of those ear piercing whistles after every song. As Sandra put it, the trains that roar past our place in East Anklescratch are quieter. Fortunately, she either went somewhere else (not that there was much somewhere else to go to) or had enough because sometime before intermission, she stopped and I don't remember afterwards her hastening my impending total deafness.

I haven't mentioned lighting at either show because I've pretty much described Martin's lighting in great detail before. Nothing's changed there, it's always a treat to see a show lit by him. In fact, he flew in from Todd Rundgren's tour for these two shows. I don't know if he'll be back for the rest of the shows but I do know he had a 4am lobby call Saturday morning to get to wherever he needed to be.

Aftershow was...probably the worst aftershow we've been to—it must be a Chicago thing. Me and Andy felt that even the 1998 Loading Platform aftershow was better than this. Sandra likened it to the 1999 Chicago HoB aftershow except with crappier surroundings. Given our experience with the Arcada to that point, we shouldn't have expected anything else and sure enough, we weren't let down. They assembled everybody up on the main floor, off to one side so they could start setting up tables (where the chairs had been ripped out) for some event the next day. They then had people with white Arcada passes go in first. Probably after 20 minutes, they started letting small groups of "armband" people in. We probably waited another 10 minutes or so, then they asked, literally "how many in your party?" I said 10 and we were then ushered in...to a dungeon.

The dressing room area was down a short flight of stairs. The hallway shared space with another small bar with live music so when that door opened, loud music blared down the hallway. You turned to your left, made a U-turn and went down another 4 stairs into the very narrow hallway where the dressing rooms were. Alan was in the one large one off to the right and it was clear that the Arcada was running this like a receiving line at a wedding. Later, Sandra remarked that it was just like 1999 House of Blues in that the venue people wanted you in and out of there pronto. Actually you couldn't fit people in there in the first place, again the "everything is narrow" motif reared its ugly head. It would have been far better to hold it upstairs in the original staging area. That way band members could come up if they wanted or not, nobody would feel cramped and you never felt as if you were in anybody's way. This whole "in and out" procession resulted in Julie, Alan G and his boss John getting the boot at some point. All I know is that I'm talking with Manny when Peej comes down and says "there's some woman upstairs asking for you". Heh heh, it took me forever just to get past the venue people to talk with Manny so I made sure they knew who I was (they did) and went up and retrieved our party.

We didn't stay for much longer, it was that cramped and the three of us (me, Sandra, Andy) were pretty beat. In fact, the venue people kicked everybody out again but missed Sandra who was saved by Lisa, thus it was Sandra who said good bye to everybody while we cooled our heels outside. You can ask Alan G and Julie about the pre-wedding party going on in the lobby of the hotel when we got back. ;)

Saturday morning we got more of Alan G's and John's reactions to the shows (this might as well have been Alan G's first show given the years that have passed and the complete difference to the show) over breakfast. Both are now hooked. If Alan comes anywhere in the Central Time Zone and it's not some "end-of-month-end-of-quarter" nonsense for work, they're in. Seems like old times. We all then hit the

road. We dropped Andy off at the Geneva train station as he was heading into Chicago proper to stay for the week. Julie had a 7 hour drive back to Omaha as did we to Podunk Junction. Alan and John had a 3.5 hour drive back to metro Indy.

This was long overdue and simply reinforced why we went to so many shows for so many years. Okay, flying to the coasts is not a viable option these days (it really has gotten harder for both of us to breakaway together) but these little double-gigs in the same time zone are great fun, plus, Alan could keep going to Milwau(l)kee and I'd want to see him just as an excuse to spend more time there.