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Beirut + Laetitia Sadier at the Congress Theater | Review and photos

Posted in [Audio File blog](#) by [Gavin Paul](#) on Sep 28, 2011 at 6:08pm



Beirut performs at Congress Theatre in Chicago on 9.26.11 with Laetitia Sadier

Photo: Rory O'Connor

Long since his teenage vagabond idealisms came to life, and the young crooner escaped his Sante Fe bedroom in chase of the hooks of Balkan sea chants, French chanson and Mexican big-band, Zach Condon of the now NYC-based Beirut was in his pop element last night at the Congress Theater, leading a five-piece band with the grown up suavity of Morrissey and the mystery of a gypsy emcee.

There were no tricks up the man's sleeve. He played it straight for a two-dozen song set spread across three EPs and two albums, including his latest, *The Rip Tide*. To record *Rip Tide*, Condon made like Justin Vernon and holed himself away in an upstate New York cabin in attempt to clear his head of a four-year touring hiatus and a punctured eardrum mishap. The result was all of Condon's worldly influences past and present fused into a pristine brass foray that allowed him to steer away from Thom-Yorke-style warbles.

In the Congress ballroom, Condon lead with an old debut cut fav, "Scenic World," nixing the record's drum machine fill for a xylophone tinkle. Fans were in sing-along mode from the get-go, Condon lofting a lyric about imagining a carefree life, layering a three-part trumpet fill over its signature accordion sway, in a huge proud, bright horn moment, while a series of string bulbs lit their way up to a hook in the ceiling.

The sentiments were clear the entire evening, for the most part, at a venue notorious for its hit-or-miss sound issues. If Condon wasn't beaming under the solo light of a mandolin fill on fan faves like "A Sunday Smile" or "Postcards From Italy," he was one-arming trumpet fills, and announced stories with a confidence that wasn't in evidence behind the more cacophonous quirks of his early days. There were some of those dramatic instrumentals plugged in there for fun. But they would be followed with something like "Nantes" off *The Flying Club Cup*, Condon clear as ever, aching out "It's been a long time now since I've seen your smile."

Teasing a handful of encores at the end of the evening, Condon came back out for one last bare *Flying Club Cup* mandolin number, "The Penalty," an old Parisian cafe tune wrought with parental imagery and lines about "fully grown children" and "impassable nights," the now 25-year old a married man with house and dog. If it were an earlier version of Condon, the tune might have been marred by overwrought wailing. But this time every word was a clear dance around your head. And with an onstage wave, the band came on to bring it home, tuba, accordion, trumpet and all. It's always great to see an artist grow.

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Anonymous 467 days ago
 thanks for the review- we are attending their show in MI in a few weeks and cannot wait. can i ask (if you remember) how long the show was? (i assume the opening band played for a good hour before they even began?)thanks so much!

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- | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|
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