

# LIFE

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## Summer Sonic sizzles

Stevie Wonder and Jay-Z lived up to their top billing, while Die Antwoord and Band of Skulls added alternative oomph at the music festival in Osaka and Tokyo last weekend

BY DAVID FRAZIER  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER IN TOKYO

Japan's Summer Sonic music festival may have been mainly about the stadium-sized bombast of Jay-Z and a slate of cranking, angry, angsty rock bands from 90s alternative icons Smashing Pumpkins to nu-metal heroes Nickelback, but it's a testament to Stevie Wonder and his marvelous singing career that a performance whose predominant musical emotion was joy could carry the weekend.

The now-legendary 60-year-old blind musician has been laying low in recent years, but the last few months have seen both major festival appearances and a gig at the White House for US President Barack Obama. Sunday night in Tokyo, almost everything about his performance differed from the musicians who'd taken the stage before him. There were no DJ booths, amplifier stacks or projected visuals giving every song a music video feel. Instead, there was a band of 15 or 20 players, including backup singers who danced in sync, a full horn section and a covey of hand-drummers. This was Motown at its peak, and it was on stage at Chiba Marine Stadium near Tokyo in 2010.

Wonder ran the show like the musical godfather he now is, calling out his sons and guest singers for solo spots, preaching happiness to the audience and even giving a musical shout out to Jay-Z, the previous night's headliner in Tokyo. Saying that there is a song he's really been liking a lot lately, he encouraged the crowd to sing the chorus to *Empire State of Mind* — though they didn't really get it — for just a few moments before digging back into his catalogue.

And what a deep catalogue it is. Wonder's voice has hardly changed an iota since when I first began hearing it on American pop radio stations in the 1980s, and while he naturally sang hits from that era like *I Just Called to Say I Love You*, he skipped no part of the song book, and especially jammed up a number of tunes that helped take funk mainstream in the early 1970s, like *Higher Ground*, *Superstition* and *Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours*. The closer was the deliriously joyous *Happy Birthday*, followed by a drum jam and fireworks exploding over the stadium.

The night before, Jay-Z similarly lived up to his top billing. I started out watching it from the VIP skybox, mainly because I figured that's where Jay-Z would be if he somehow had the ability to watch himself, but his jams were so rocking I decided to hit the pit in front of the stage. And anyway, there was no Petron on ice in the VIP, just waitresses in cheerleader uniforms.

Live, Jay-Z uses a lot of power rock to put oomph into his music. Though his set began playing up the solitary genius image — Jay-Z in a spotlight, alone save a microphone, dark sunglasses and designer ear plugs — a DJ and a full backing rock band slowly emerged, and the band cranked an extra layer of power chords on top of recent tunes like *On the Next On* and *Death of Autotune*. Classic riffs from the Doors, Aerosmith and others pervaded the set, and Jay-Z even sang a chorus of *Where is the Love* over a sample from U2's *Bloody Sunday*. But whatever you think about the rapper's string of appropriations, his sense of showmanship left no room for disappointment. What we saw on stage was both Jay-Z the rapper, and Jay-Z the CEO of the

enterprise that's turned his own persona into a mass entertainment commodity.

Smashing Pumpkins and Hole were perhaps the most anticipated 90s rock acts on tap, though much of that was related to offstage drama. Hole's lead singer Courtney Love continues to live in and out of drug rehab, and Smashing Pumpkins only just reformed after 10 years, with signer Billy Corrigan as the only remaining original member. Hole's inclusion mainly added another big name to the festival schedule, and while the Smashing Pumpkins were far better, their sound was sometimes murky or simply noisy, and only on a few occasions did it provide the pure explosive impact they are known for.

The Pixies and Pavement were by contrast everything their 30-something fans wanted them to be: deep in their classic song books, full of the same old stage power, and knowing how to mix things up musically and give tested songs a live improvised feel. Pavement's lead singer Stephen Malkmus was on his game, giving his lyrics that wonderful sly delivery that defies poppiness and plays up a sense of continuing poignancy.

So what about new music? Or, to quote every other song in hip-hop these days, what about that next level s—tuff? Well, if there is anyone out there delivering it, it is the South African rap crew Die Antwoord. Whether they are just severing up a truly bizarre schtick, or whether they really are white trash from a parallel universe where MC Ninja really smokes weed nonstop and has had a child by his sex-bomb sidekick and stage partner Yo-Landi Vi\$\$er, they are an act to behold. Their shake-the-room techno beats, raps in English and Afrikaans, and sometimes pornographic visuals could work at either a club party or contemporary art exhibition. The new UK rock trio Band of Skulls was not as theatrical, but its set on a relatively minor stage opened up a big ol' can of rock-your-ass-off.

Taking place in Tokyo and Osaka last weekend, Summer Sonic drew a total of 158,000 fans, capping a 10-day stretch that saw Japan's largest musical events of the year. A weekend earlier, Fuji Rock drew 137,000 fans over three days.



Clockwise from top left: Country artist Taylor Swift, singer-songwriter Stevie Wonder, hip-hop magnate Jay-Z and South African rap crew Die Antwoord perform at Summer Sonic. PHOTOS (C) SUMMER SONIC 2010 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



[ SOCIETY ]

## The King's home in South Korea

Elvis fan Lee Jong-Jin keeps the entertainer's memory alive with a self-run, non-profit memorial hall

BY NAM YOU-SUN  
AFP, PAJU, SOUTH KOREA

More than 30 years after the untimely death of Elvis Presley, devotees worldwide are still paying fervent tribute to the King of Rock 'n' Roll.

They don't come more ardent than South Korean Lee Jong-Jin, who sold two apartments to build his own memorial hall — halfway around the world from the world-famed Graceland museum in Memphis.

The Follow That Dream hall at Paju, north of Seoul, which opened a decade ago and is named after a 1962 Elvis movie, houses a huge collection of memorabilia.

A 200-inch screen plays constant edited footage of Elvis performing in Las Vegas in August 1970. Visitors are strongly recommended to finish their tour by watching the film on comfortable red couches.

Positioned between the screen and the seats are three sets of amplifiers, each reproducing different music styles from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Every inch of wall space is plastered with pictures and placards of Elvis, album covers and lyrics of his hit songs. Life-size models of the King, strumming a guitar or clutching a microphone, adorn the hall.

"The memorial hall is non-profit so I spend a lot of money trying to maintain it," said Lee, sporting a black shirt imprinted with Elvis's face and with his hair moussed back like his idol.

Lee, who runs a Seoul publishing company, said although he has no money, he also has no debt because — believe it or not — "Elvis transfers money to the accounts" whenever the memorial hall needs it.

The hall attracts many Japanese, American and British tourists but Lee said his aim is to pay tribute to Elvis rather than run a theme park-type operation.

He does not sell snacks or drinks except on the days around the Jan. 8 anniversary of the singer's birth in 1935 and the anniversary of his death on Aug. 16, 1977.

On those special occasions he offers steaks and other favorite Elvis dishes to visitors and members of the Korean fan club of which he is president.

Lee spends around 30 million won to 40 million won (US\$25,000 to US\$34,000) on each event.

He painstakingly put together his 10,000-item collection in a variety of ways. Some of his 72 old records came from US soldiers based in South Korea.

Parked outside the hall is a white Cadillac Eldorado that was part of the escort for Elvis's coffin. Five other cars similar to those once driven by him were bought at auction by Lee or members of his fan club.

"All my collection is equally important and valuable to me," he said. "Once, a huge fire burned everything and another time a flood ruined them. I had to start from ground zero and it was heartbreaking."

Lee said officials from Graceland, the singer's former home, once visited his memorial hall to check whether he was violating copyright by offering pirated DVDs or CDs.

"They were surprised to see that I wasn't selling anything and that this place served a pure purpose."

Lee described his passion for Elvis's music as "love at first sight." "I heard a melody and I realized that he was the one. It has been more than 40 years since then and I don't even remember what song it was."

The music can even cure hangovers, he once told a radio program. "Hundreds called me over the next few days and asked which particular song that was. The answer is, all Elvis songs. It's obvious that Elvis has become a big part of my life."

"Both my wife and my daughter love Elvis and love what I do for him because they also recognize Elvis is an honorable man."

Asked his own age, Lee said he stopped counting when he turned 42 because "that is the age Elvis died."

Various local councils, he said, have offered to relocate his exhibition in bigger and better premises elsewhere in the country. A decision will be made around the end of the year.

"Then more people will be able to enjoy and appreciate Elvis's music and legacy," said Lee.

Except for special occasions, the Follow That Dream hall is open from 1pm to 7pm on Saturdays and Sundays. Reservations must be made in advance.



Elvis Presley fan Lee Jong-Jin poses with his collection at the Follow That Dream memorial hall for his longtime idol in Paju, north of Seoul. Lee, who runs a publishing company, describes his passion for the King's music as "love at first sight." PHOTO: AFP