Alice Cooper and Rob Zombie seem like they could be family: two generations of macabre musical showmen with a fondness for heavy riffs and theatrical bombast. Cooper has even gone so far as to call Zombie his “grandson” in interviews, although the latter’s brand of fun B-movie bluster has never really lashed concerned parents into a froth of moral outrage the way Cooper’s subversive act and lyrics did during his heyday.

And while the two shock rockers have often traded mutual admiration and done the occasional one-off gig together throughout their long careers, Cooper and Zombie have never shared a stage as part of a full tour. The recent Gruesome Twosome tour was set to right that wrong—so was this overdue pairing worth the wait?

Cooper opens the show, and any misgivings that his golf-obsessed, born-again Christian lifestyle may have diminished his energy quickly vanish as Uncle Alice swirls onto the stage in black leather and trademark eye makeup. He’s backed by a tight four-piece band that delivers their boss’ familiar songs with an agreeably rougher edge than the album versions. It’s coarse enough to wash the taste of his recent AMERICAN IDOL appearance right out of your mouth.

Cooper’s set is front-loaded with his best-known stuff, and he rips through “School’s Out,” “No More Mr. Nice Guy,” and “I’m Eighteen” in quick succession. The show flags a little as the set list delves into the less familiar, but from here on in, Cooper cranks up his lauded theatricality. The famous guillotine gag makes its appearance early in the show, complete with a comical half-second lag between the blade striking and the prop head falling into the basket below. Two other mock executions follow later on, by gallows and iron maiden. A dancer in a filthy nurse’s costume (this is Nurse Rosetta, of course) slithers around Cooper and the rest of the band throughout the majority of the songs, and at one point showers Cooper with a plume of sparks

as she slashes an industrial grinder along the crotch of her metal-plated undergarments (seriously).

The set turns out to be as comprehensive as 80 minutes will allow, featuring all the requisite classics whose names drunk fans repeatedly holler, like “Billion Dollar Babies,” ’80s comeback hit “Poison” and the world heavyweight champion of sensitive ballads, “Only Women Bleed.” More serious fans are no doubt pleased with the consideration given to Cooper’s underappreciated independent-label output of late, like the title track from DIRTY DIAMONDS and “Vengeance Is Mine” from last year’s ALONG CAME A SPIDER album. After traditional show-closer “Under My Wheels,” Cooper and co. take their deserved bow and make way for Zombie.

A short intermission, and then Zombie appears. For this tour, he has quietly assembled a bit of a metal supergroup: Ex-Marilyn Manson cohort John 5 on guitar, Piggy D of Wednesday 13 on bass and a brand new addition of Slipknot’s Joey Jordison on drums (RIP Paul Gray). Compared to Slipknot’s frenetic drum hailstorm, one can imagine that Jordison could play the effective but rudimentary beats of Zombie’s songs with one hand while filling out his taxes with the other. Either way, the band seemed to be having as much fun with the show as the audience was, John 5 in particular flashing a permanent grin as the crowd stabbed devil horns at his every chord change. The stroboscopic visuals that constantly play on screens behind the band is what Zombie likely sees on the insides of his eyelids before he falls asleep: *anime*, THE MUNSTERS, Charles Manson girls, Ultraman, old peep-show nudie loops and, of course, a load of footage from his own movies and music videos.

As for Zombie himself, say what you want about his output in other media—as a performer, the man knows how to work a room. More barking than singing, he’s all about self-aware swagger delivered with a wink. From amusing carnival midway patter between songs, to giant robot puppets randomly wobbling around the stage, to having a stoned-looking teenager in the front row who refused to sing along to the chorus of new tune “Mars Needs Women” projected on the big screen so the rest of the crowd could boo him, Zombie keeps entertainingly busy throughout the night.

Like Cooper, Zombie works to mix the old with the new in his set. White Zombie material like “Thunder Kiss ’65” is resurrected, alongside hits from his ’90s creative peak like “Superbeast” and “Living Dead Girl.” The momentum falters midway when the slow, twangy theme from HOUSE OF 1000 CORPSES causes the attention of the mosh pit to drift, but Zombie recovers nicely with a chugging rendition of “Demonoid Phenomenon.” There’s one unforgivable stumble in the entire concert, and it occurs at the end of the encore closer “Dragula.” Zombie asks the

crowd to applaud in order to entice Cooper back onto the stage, and he obliges to an excited roar. Here's an opportunity to create a unique moment for this tour—maybe a run through Cooper's "Feed My Frankenstein," on which Zombie has assisted The Coop before at other gigs. Perhaps "Hands of Death," Zombie and Cooper's hissing collaboration from the X FILES TV soundtrack. Instead, the band strikes up "School's Out," which Cooper opened with a mere three hours ago. The tune is welcome and the crowd sings along for the second time, but it still feels like a missed opportunity capping an otherwise excellent show.

The Gruesome Twosome tour has now completed its short run, but there are tentative plans for a second leg in the autumn. If you don't feel like waiting, Zombie will continue to appear this summer as part of the Mayhem Festival, and Cooper can be seen headlining his own "Theatre of Death" tour at a venue near you. For info on Gruesome Twosome, including links to Cooper and Zombie's individual sites, click here .

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