

REVIEW | NEIL DIAMOND

Raspy singing a painful letdown

By Aaron Beck
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

While a back-up singer did her part during *You Don't Bring Me Flowers* last night in Value City Arena, Neil Diamond sat at a white linen-draped table for two and sipped a glass of red wine.

He should have pounded four shots of honey and a pint of Robitussin, and then climbed into a time machine and journeyed far away from the stage, because this show should not have gone on.

From the beginning of the concert at 8:15 when he barked, "Hello, Columbus" (and laid waste to the lyrics of *Holly Holy*) through the end of the set at 10 p.m. (with the campy rock-gospel, we're-all-God's-children number *Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show*), the Jazz Singer's pipes coughed up words to familiar songs in sounds that can be described only as painful.

No one who's been checking in on Diamond's 67-year-old voice could have seen saw it coming. Recent YouTube clips from the tour find him in fine form, and although his voice on his latest albums has a naturally deeper, more gravely quality, it's nowhere near Tom Waits/Bob Dylan/Joe Cocker territory.

Which is why an hour in,

while Diamond's feral-sounding throat croaked *Solitary Man*, more than 70 people were standing in line at a customer service walk-up in the lobby asking for refunds for tickets — face value \$19.50 to \$120.

Heidi Boyle, in Columbus for business, was one. She said she's attended "maybe a dozen concerts" in her life — five of them by Diamond. She saw a show in July in Minneapolis.

"It was phenomenal," Boyle said. "This is not what it sounded like. This was just sad because I love his music. It's not even about the money. It's about the time. People in front of me drove from Kansas to go to the show."

(As of deadline — 12:15 a.m. today — details about refunds were sketchy. Boyle said venue representatives were taking names and numbers and promising to call upset ticket holders today.)

Typically when a singer goes on with the show, despite an obvious ailment, the singer's acknowledgment of the distraction after the first song diffuses the distraction. Audience members then pull for the singer to power through every tune and they will wholeheartedly applaud with a raucous combination of sympathy and enthusiasm.



JAMES DeCAMP | DISPATCH

Neil Diamond performs to a large crowd at the Value City Arena. Last night's hoarse set left many people seeking refunds.

Diamond called himself out not once during the show, which was akin to pretending a house isn't on fire when all four walls are going down in flames around you.

It was all a letdown for a few reasons. The 14-piece band was classy all night, sounded great, never distracted from their leader in black and it was grandiose only when a song called for a smidge of pomp (OK — a lot

during the sing-along *Sweet Caroline* and the clanging *America*).

The stage show, which included a noncloying sentimental journey in the form of film footage from Diamond's working-class New York stomping grounds (during *Brooklyn Roads*), was not the overblown, Las Vegas-style affair most people might expect from the man who put the spangle in spangled shirt.

The set list was packed with the usual hits — *Cherry, Cherry*; *Forever in Blue Jeans*; *Love on the Rocks* — all delivered in a hellishly dry, Howlin' Wolf-like rasp. It also contained three tunes from Diamond's latest low-key, songwriterly album, *Home Before Dark*.

The proper set ended with the recent *Hell Yeah* (a tribute to Johnny Cash from 2005's *12 Songs*) before Diamond left the stage, changed his shirt

and returned (in less than a minute) to bang out *America* and the aforementioned *Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show*.

"It was a hot August night," Diamond hoarsely sang-spoke as he began the song.

Not really. It was more like an anticlimactic August night that a lot of people who paid a lot of money to witness will try to forget.

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SPEED READ

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NATION & WORLD

Video shows teenage bombing suspect

Iraqi police released video yesterday of a teenage girl wearing an explosives vest that she says relatives forced her to wear. The release of the video might be part of an effort to turn Iraqis against insurgents, who are recruiting female bombers. | **A3**

Israel frees 198 Palestinian prisoners

Israel released 198 Palestinian prisoners yesterday in a good-

will gesture aimed at reviving the peace process. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who arrived later in the day, acknowledged that a broad peace deal is a long shot before President Bush leaves office, but she said progress is important. | **A3**

Some dining halls are ditching trays

The days of piling dining-hall trays high is over at some colleges and universities. A growing number of schools are doing away with trays in an effort to cut food waste and conserve water used in dishwashing. Students aren't necessarily sold on the idea, however. | **A8**

Ex-prime minister Thatcher has dementia

Margaret Thatcher, Britain's prime minister from 1979 to 1990, is suffering from dementia, her family has confirmed. The news has come as a blow to Britons and colleagues who recall Thatcher, now 82, as "ageless, timeless and 100 percent cast-iron damage-proof." Daughter Carol Thatcher writes in a memoir of the pain of having to tell her mother over and over that her husband, Denis, died in 2003. | **A8**

METRO & STATE

Ohio State conducting trials of heart device

A large international study started yesterday at Ohio State, possibly opening the door for heart-failure patients currently ineligible for a resynchronization device. According to researchers, as many as 1 million patients nationwide could benefit if the trials are successful. | **B1**

U.S. Postal Service stamping out machines

The U.S. Postal Service is removing stamp-dispensing machines from the 24-hour lobbies of post offices. The machines are obsolete and parts are no longer available, according to postal officials who said customers can go to groceries and pharmacies for stamps after hours. | **B1**

Police suit ruled a class-action case

A lawsuit against the Columbus Division of Police over forcing employees to divulge their illness when they return from sick leave can be tried as a class-action suit, a judge has ruled. The city would have to pay a lot more if it loses because the number of plaintiffs

expands from the six who filed the suit to any division employee who can show the policy violated his or her medical privacy rights. | **B1**

SCIENCE

Astronomers' huge sky survey continues

More than 300 astronomers are collaborating in the Sloan Digital Sky Survey, a massive search of space for new discoveries that has resulted in more than 1,500 scientific articles during the past eight years. So far, more than 340 million images of stars and galaxies have been taken and 3-D maps of wide slices of space have been created. | **B4**

SPORTS

OSU's Boeckman exudes confidence

With a season as Ohio State's starting quarterback under his belt, Todd Boeckman enters 2008 as the confident leader of the OSU offense. "He has overcome a lot of things to get to this point," said his father, Tim Boeckman. "Now you can see his maturity." OSU coach Jim Tressel sees a player who has "great command of what we're trying to do." | **C1**

Clippers packing up relics from Cooper

The kitchen sink might not be on the list of transferable items when the Clippers move from Cooper Stadium to Huntington Park, but the Paul Bunyan-size Clipper hat above the door of the souvenir shop is. As is just about everything else that isn't part of the permanent structure. The team plays its final game on W. Mound Street on Monday, against Toledo. | **C1**

Nadal bordering on tennis greatness

Rafael Nadal appears to have ushered in a new era of men's tennis by completing the adaptation of his game to all three surfaces. The 22-year-old Spaniard gained the No. 1 spot on the ATP Tour on Aug. 18 after spending a record 160 weeks at No. 2 behind Roger Federer. Nadal's current streak of 39 wins in 40 matches — the latest a first-round win in the U.S. Open yesterday — includes two tournament championships each on clay, grass and hard courts. | **C1**

BUSINESS

Nationwide subsidiary to lay off 30 workers

GatesMcDonald, a Nationwide subsidiary that's a third-party administrator for workers' comp programs, will lay off 30 people after it lost a contract. The layoffs will start Dec. 31. | **C10**

PharmaForce may expand in New Albany

PharmaForce, a Columbus pharmaceutical company, might build a \$35 million facility in New Albany that would add 200 jobs over three years. But Massachusetts and New Mexico are competing for the project. The state of Ohio is offering more than \$14 million in loans to keep the company here. | **C10**

Topping the 'perfect 10'

Eleven is the Hyde Park Restaurant Group's newest creation, a small-plates and cocktail bar adjoining its Hyde Park Prime Steakhouse on the I-670 cap on N. High Street. | **C10**

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The Hot Issue

Will you watch political convention coverage of both parties, only one party or none at all? Comment at Dispatch.com.

How you voted

Those who commented had a variety of favorite moments from the Beijing Olympics.

What you said

"Too many to count. Of course Phelps winning the eight. But Jamaica's 'Lightning Bolt' was very impressive."

"The return to gold for the USA men's basketball team. Back-to-back golds for beach volleyball."

"The opening ceremony was outstanding. I've been around for a few Olympics, and I think the Chinese outdid any in my memory."

METRO & STATE

School report cards

What grade did your school or district get on its 2007-08 state report card? Find the grades for schools from across the state in an interactive database at Dispatch.com/education.

POLITICS

Democratic convention

It's not all business in Denver, where Ohio delegates were able to attend a concert by the Dave Matthews Band and Sheryl Crow. Our reporters give you the latest from the scene at DispatchPolitics.com.

SPORTS

New PrepCast

Dispatch sportswriters discuss the first week of high-school football action and talk to Pickerington Central coach Tom Phillips on this week's PrepCast. Hear the podcast at Dispatch.com/podcasts.

OLYMPICS

Gathering gold

The U.S. finished with 36 gold medals in a wide range of sports, including cycling,



JOE BURBANK | ORLANDO SENTINEL

On the move Residents Jeff Moser and Roxanne Frasco use a canoe to move belongings after Debary, Fla., was hit by floodwaters related to Tropical Storm Fay. Get current data on major storms in the interactive storm tracker at Dispatch.com/multimedia.

shooting, sailing and equestrian jumping. See all the winners in action in slide shows at Dispatch.com/olympics.

LIFE & ARTS

An easier pace

At Obetz TV, semi-retired repairman Tom Harmon tries not to let work interfere too much with his other activities, including playing guitar with

buddies. Meet him in an audio slide show at Dispatch.com/multimedia.

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