

"Cheap Trick at Budokan"--Cheap Trick (1978)

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Essay by Robert Lawson (guest post)*



Cheap Trick

At the end of April 1978, Cheap Trick flew to Japan for a six-date headlining tour. To coincide with this, the forthcoming studio album, "Heaven Tonight," was issued in Japan just ahead of its US release. Cheap Trick played shows in Fukuoka (April 25th), Nagoya (April 26th), Osaka (April 27th), Tokyo (April 28th and 30th) and Shizuoka (May 1st). The near-hysterical Japanese fans welcomed the band with rapturous applause. A special tour-book was created, using the exact same picture of lead vocalist Robin Zander and bassist Tom Petersson featured on the "Heaven Tonight" sleeve, but with the title "Concert in Japan" on the front cover.

In July, an edited version of the first concert in Tokyo was shown on Japanese TV. The program, "Cheap Trick at Budokan," featured footage from the soundcheck, tracked the eager crowds filing in, and, eventually, followed the band onto the stage. With Zander positively glowing in an all-white three-piece suit and guitarist Rick Nielsen slashing away at his Hamer Standard prototype, the performance is an equal display of incredible showmanship and musicianship. Although all the footage is extremely valuable (and was even more so at the time), it is extra special to witness the previously unreleased, excellent tracks "Lookout" and "Can't Hold On" performed live, along with the 1955 Fats Domino hit "Ain't That a Shame" (which the band learned from John Lennon's 1975 "Rock 'n' Roll" album).

The tour was so successful that a special live album was assembled just for the Japanese market, with post-production work done back at The Record Plant in New York. While some of Zander's guitar parts and a few background vocals were slightly touched up, almost all of Tom Petersson's bass work had to be redone, since Japanese engineer Tomoo Suzuki had trouble capturing Petersson's new Hamer Quad 12-string instrument. A swirling keyboard part was also added to "Surrender" to make it sound more like the "Heaven Tonight" version. Original Cheap Trick producer Jack Douglas worked with Nielsen and drummer Bun E. Carlos on sequencing and getting the tapes up to the proper quality.

Released in Japan in October of 1978, "Cheap Trick at Budokan" was specifically designed to present the more pop-friendly material from the concerts (portions of the April 27th Osaka

show were used as well). Although the album was not available to North American fans, radio stations were issued a special promotional sampler LP for on-air play. "From Tokyo To You" presents just seven songs from the album. Response to this material was so strong that record stores began stocking the higher-priced Japanese import album and selling them in droves to fans clamouring for the vibrant music that was more energetic and exciting than anything they had heard on the previous three studio albums. The Japanese import version of "Cheap Trick at Budokan" reportedly sold 30,000 copies in the US.

Finally, the band's North American record label realized that there was no sense in denying local fans this music (or themselves the revenue to be garnered from its sales). "Cheap Trick at Budokan" was released in North America in February of 1979 with a colorful gate-fold sleeve and a 12-page booklet, which included all the lyrics in both English and Japanese. Magazine ads to promote the release made sure to point out that the album had been "made in Japan but now available at lower domestic prices."

All songs benefit from Robin Zander's strong, hard lead vocals. For "Big Eyes," he practically barks the verses and then switches to an almost croon for the choruses. "Need Your Love" is a slow burning meditation with gorgeous, natural vibrato vocals. Near the end, things start to pick up steam when Nielsen solos recklessly. At this point, "Need Your Love" had not appeared on any Cheap Trick album and, in fact, was not even included on the Japanese television broadcast.

Side two begins with the run through of "Ain't That a Shame" (although appearing second-to-last at the concert, it was moved up for the album). With the live recording of "I Want You to Want Me," the band finally had an arrangement that maintained the edge of their original guitar-heavy demo but added the shiny pop feel from the "In Color" studio take. The freshly released "Surrender" gets an extra surge of vitality as the audience is clearly as excited to hear it as the band is to play it. "Goodnight" successfully bookends the main part of the show as preserved on vinyl before one final burst of fervor. "Clock Strikes Ten" is a final celebratory thrust to cap the night with extra manic drumming from Carlos. The studio version of this song had been a number one hit in Japan.

As predicted, the album was a huge success in North America, reaching number four in the US and number one in Canada. It also hit number two on the Dutch charts, number ten in New Zealand, number 26 in Sweden and number 29 in the UK. The UK release of the album was slightly re-titled as "Cheap Trick at The Budokan" and was pressed on highly questionable "kamikaze" yellow vinyl.

The single "I Want You to Want Me" (live)/ "Clock Strikes Ten" (live) hit number seven in the US, two in Canada, #23 in New Zealand, #29 in the UK and #43 in Australia.

The follow-up single, "Ain't That a Shame" (live)/ "ELO Kiddies," reached number 33 in the US, ten in Canada and #24 in New Zealand. A Japanese single for "I Want You to Want Me"/"Surrender"(live) was issued in that country only.

Although the band would continue to mine the Budokan material for many future releases (1994's "Budokan II," the 1998 20th anniversary "At Budokan: The Complete Concert" and

2008's 30th anniversary four-disc "Budokan!" boxed set), the original "Cheap Trick at Budokan" remains the cornerstone in the band's long and illustrious career.

Robert Lawson is a long-time music fan and collector. He is the author of the books "Razama-Snaz! The Listener's Guide to Nazareth" (2016), "Still Competition: The Listener's Guide to Cheap Trick" and "Wheatfield Empire: The Listener's Guide to the Guess Who" (2020).

*The opinions expressed in this essay are those of the author and may not reflect those of the Library of Congress.