



# **Review: Van Morrison stretches out, settles in brilliantly for the first of three sold out shows at Clearwater's Ruth Eckerd Hall**

*His 20 song song, 90 minute set was sort of a warm up and victory lap at the same time.*

**RAY ROA, CHRIS RODRIGUEZ — JAN 18, 2017 2 AM**



**Van Morrison plays Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater, Florida on January 17, 2017.**

CHRIS RODRIGUEZ

Van Morrison's childhood was soundtracked by blues and jazz men like Jelly Roll Morton and Sonny Terry. When he was about 11 years old, his father — a shipyard electrician with a voracious appetite for music — bought him his first guitar. There was a saxophone after that, and by the time Morrison was 19 years old he was singing “Gloria” as a part of Them — a little band from Belfast in Northern Ireland. That song would go on to be considered one of the greatest of all time. It’s in the Grammy Hall of Fame. Bowie, Springsteen, Hendrix and even Bill Murray have covered it.

So, on Tuesday night, as the now 71 year old living legend from Northern Ireland effortlessly sang “Gloria” to close out the first of three sold out shows at Clearwater’s Ruth Eckerd Hall, it was hard not to wonder: is the seemingly immortal Van Morrison a man or some kind of mystic?

### **STREAM A PLAYLIST OF SONGS VAN MORRISON PLAYED IN CLEARWATER ON JAN. 17, 2017**

His warbly, seemingly inebriated sing-speak delivery is in near perfect shape. He looks infinitely cool in his pressed suits, and you almost don’t want to see what he’s thinking behind those trademark sunglasses. In 90 minutes, Morrison literally said nothing onstage except “give it up for this band.” Shit, he even ended the set with zero fanfare and nary a hint of an encore. A 15 minute jam from the band — which included singer Dana Masters, guitarist Dave Keary and bandleader Paul Moran on keys, trumpet, and cornet — was all fans got before the house lights cut on.

Come to think of it, there was a lot Morrison didn’t do. “Tupelo Honey,” “And It Stoned Me,” “Crazy Love,” and even “Queen of the Slipstream” were all left off the setlist. The man is more than adept on sax and harmonica, but he didn’t touch any of the seven guitars onstage. Morrison, however, might still be one of the few artists that can leave a whole lot on the table and somehow make fans feel full and content at the same time.



**Van Morrison bandleader Paul Moran plays Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater, Florida on January 17, 2017.**

*CHRIS RODRIGUEZ*

“Moondance” was one of three or four songs (including “Wild Night” and “Brown Eyed Girl”) that elicited massive singalongs, and it was a thrill despite it being one of the most played numbers in all of pop music. For every ounce of its familiarity, watching the nearly 50 year old cut’s coda come alive on stage felt fresh thanks to guitar licks and horn solos that danced around a seemingly new take on the meticulous walking bass arrangement. “Cleaning Windows” from 1982’s *Beautiful Vision* felt sharp and smart thanks to an effortless bluesy pop edge. “Here Come The Night” was a revamped country stomp, and another song from the Them days — “Baby Please Don’t Go” — served as a fire starter with Morrison throwing heat into his harmonica mic while Moran made his Leslie work overdrive on organ riffs that were as silky as they were muscular.

Morrison hasn’t played in the area in about two decades, and he likely won’t come back before it’s all said and done, but the show didn’t necessarily feel like a legacy gig or obligatory victory lap. He whet his saxophone reed in between solos with the same excitement boys in the middle school band display. His hands motioned up and down with hi hat crashes. With two hands clasped on the microphone stand, he leaned back and looked up into the rafters several times while delivering that unique vocal cadence and enunciation fans have come to love. Morrison even watched, and listened, to his band with glee on nearly every cut. This wasn’t a man intent on playing music his fans were going to love (although they did). On Tuesday night Morrison was a man still looking for something in those songs. New cuts (last year’s “Too Late” and even reworked classics like “Real Real Gone” and “Carrying A Torch”) felt revelatory, but so did semi-

oldies like “Jackie Wilson Said” and “Enlightenment.” Bandleader Moran made room for plenty of solos, but not for a solo’s sake. No, he was making room because — sometimes in a live setting — a completely new thing manifests itself in those spaces.

So while Morrison the man sleeps, another set of fans gets to wake up knowing that Morrison the mystic will treat them to a new set of songs on nights two and three of this Florida run. We won’t all be lucky enough to get to all three shows (a ticket to Tuesday night’s affair alone could’ve covered the car note for the average person), but know this: Morrison is a master of making the mystery of a song (even ones we’ve heard on record a thousand times) feel special.

And maybe that — the act of treating every song, set and night of your life like something wholly special and unique — is the secret to living forever after all.

**Van Morrison at Ruth Eckerd Hall — Clearwater, Florida (January 17, 2017)**

*Stream and download songs from the setlist [here](#).*

Too Late

Magic Time

Moondance

Baby Please Don’t Go (Them)

Here Comes The Night

Sometimes We Cry

Cleaning Windows

Enlightenment

Real Real Gone

In The Afternoon

Ancient Highway

Whenever God Shines His Light On Me

In the Midnight

I Can’t Stop Loving You (The Chieftains)

Wild Night

Have I Told You Lately

Jackie Wilson Said (I’m In Heaven When You Smile)

Carrying A Torch

Brown Eyed Girl

Gloria (Them)



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**Dave Keary plays Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater, Florida on January 17, 2017.**

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Posted by Pancreas

Jan 18 2017 06:26 Goi

to see him Thursday. Glad to see a + review. From what I've read it can be up and down. The not interacting with the audience doesn't bother me. I expect that and no encore, but I want to hear him sing. 20 songs over 90 min of straight music! Can't wait!



Posted by mark1209

Jan 18 2017 10:20 The

you for this very hip review. I am amazed he can be this good at 71 and yes, the tradeoff is we get his hits and others but he won't talk to us, introduce the band or do encores. 90 minutes more or less on schedule. The older audience loved

all of it especially the group dance during Gloria. Go if you are in Florida and beg for a ticket. This is probably the last local gig and he is still an inspiring Live performer who paid his dues long ago.

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Posted by hcrv

Jan 18 2017 11:09It's

really annoying to hear people constantly mention that Morrison isn't going to introduce his band or talk to the crowd. Really, this is that important?! You want to hear the same old tired stories that musicians repeat over and over. I've seen Paul McCartney not too long ago. It was obvious he was repeating the same stories yet again. The band even looked bored during the telling. It didn't add to the show. I'll take the music any day instead of stories and the lame "It's great to be in blah blah city" anytime.

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Posted by Louie!

Jan 20 2017 08:35|

sure  
hope the first two shows were better than the third. Lack luster, no energy and he appeared to be sick. No encore is fine, but don't let your bad close out the last 10 minutes of the show as you leave the stage for good. The anticipation of a 20-year wait and \$300 a ticket - where do I get a refund!?!?!?

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