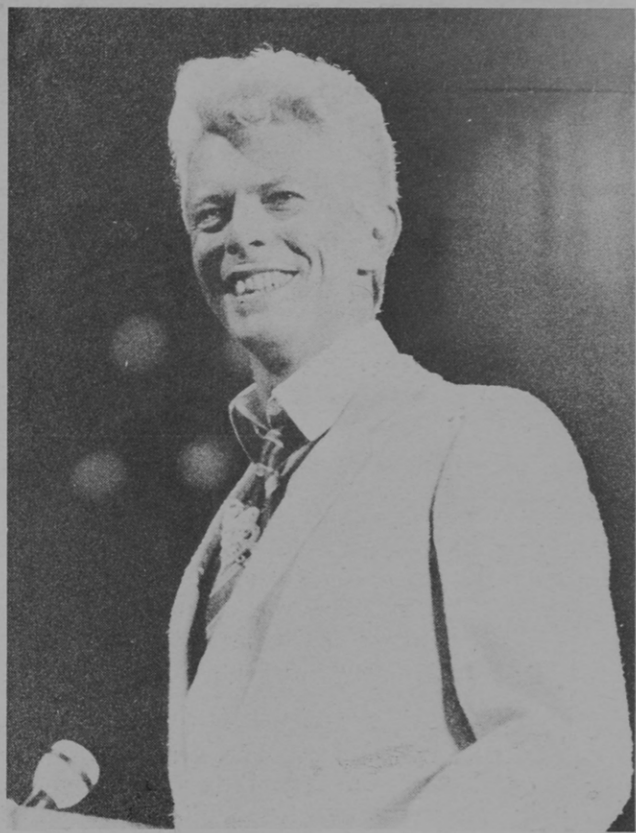


IMAGES 4 BOWIE

PHOTOS AT THE SPRINGS BY KERRY BROWN



BEHIND A PAINTED SMILE

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I suppose this has to be labelled as the most eagerly awaited tour in the history of New Zealand rock'n'roll. Bowie and his ten piece band played to a combined audience of well over 120,000, the Western Springs concert drawing nearly 80,000, an Australasian record as Bowie proudly announced at the event. You can't argue with these figures.

But what you can argue about is the value and power of the man's present live performance.

Many of us still have fond memories of the 1978 tour (where his combined draw was only 60,000) when he was still walking on an artistic and personal edge. His albums sold respectable numbers but were a far cry from the mega success of *Lets Dance*. So during the last five years, this year in particular, Bowie has become a mass entertainer and, even more so, a legendary leader of fashion, glamour and music. It's

with this current status in mind that the *Serious Moonlight* tour must be judged.

On Saturday before Western Springs, Carlos Alomar said that the 1983 tour was about Bowie singing Bowie. That's an interesting comment because in both of his New Zealand concerts he seemed to be David Bowie playing Bowie — an actor playing to the camera. This came through in his presentation and stage movements which were identical in both concerts, the only disruption to his choreography being in Wellington when he had to plead with the audience to stop crushing and trampling one another and 'be cool'. Otherwise his whole presence was a planner's dream, but a live let-down.

The songs and their order were also identical in both shows, a predictability deemed necessary by the theatrical intros of some of them ('Cracked Actor' featuring a Hamlet mime) and the computerised lighting. So the promise of an

extended set in Auckland, since it was the last major date of the tour, never eventuated. The material itself was weighted in favour of a *Best Of* plus obvious moments from *Lets Dance*. 'Look Back In Anger', the only track from *Lodger* to be aired, was an unusual opener and from there the show developed a pattern that did have some great touches; the fusion of 'Fashion' with 'Let's Dance', the real feeling of 'Life On Mars', 'Ashes To Ashes' leading into a superb 'Space Oddity' and the reliable funk of 'Stay'.

The band, who took pride in being professional — something they said they also appreciated in Bowie — were as good as anything he's ever worked with from a musical standpoint. But they were under orders and so they couldn't save their boss from the embarrassing vamp of 'Rebel Rebel' or inject surprises into what was an over-rehearsed feel.

Once the thrill of the event and the awe at the props (a huge video screen which couldn't be used in Wellington because of wind, computerised lighting, massive monolithic and polythene stage sets, crescent moons and pointing fingers) had died away, the show's lack of real excitement and energy led to an anti-climax.

Maybe it's his age (maturity?) or commercial rationalisation in his most successful year ever, but David Bowie as a live performer is moving away from the things that make rock'n'roll so important — spontaneity, tension, bite, anger and risk. I just hope that this taste of commercial omnipotence doesn't cheapen his ambitions by making him play safe to the market. Although I'm feeling short-changed by his live attitude I still have faith in his integrity. So maybe next time he'll tour with the Fall.

MORE BOWIE, PAGES 4 & 14.