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THE JOHN LODGE CELEBRATION: A NIGHT THE MUSIC REFUSED TO END

By photojournalist **Marcela Andrea** Oleson

The world premiere of The **John Lodge** Celebration transformed the Bilheimer Capitol Theatre on Friday night into a celebration of one of progressive rock's most enduring legacies. Across two unforgettable sets, the music of John Lodge and The Moody Blues was brought vividly back to life by the musicians entrusted with carrying it forward. By the music, the theater was on its feet singing along to "Ride My See-Saw," proving that these songs still possess the power to unite audiences nearly six decades after they were first written.

It feels fitting that this piece arrives today, July 20, on what would have been John Lodge's 83rd birthday. Friday's premiere was not a farewell. It was a birthday gift delivered three days early, and the whole theater got to unwrap it together.

The evening opened with a video tribute tracing John Lodge from his beginnings in Birmingham through six decades with The Moody Blues: the young bassist, the songwriter, the performer, the musician whose songs became part of the soundtrack of generations. As the final images faded, the first notes rang out. The introduction was over. The celebration had begun.

THE MAN AND THE BAND

John Lodge stands among the defining songwriters and bassists of progressive rock. Joining The Moody Blues in 1966 alongside Justin Hayward, he helped create a body of work that forever expanded the possibilities of popular music. With Graeme Edge, Ray Thomas, and Mike Pinder, the band recorded *Days of Future Passed* in 1967, blending rock with orchestral ambition in a way that changed the course of popular music.

Lodge wrote and sang some of the band's most enduring songs, including "Ride My See-Saw," "Isn't Life Strange," "Candle of Life," and "I'm Just a Singer (In a Rock and Roll Band)." The Moody Blues went on to sell tens of millions of albums worldwide and were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2018. Although Lodge is no longer here to perform these songs himself, his music continues to inspire audiences around the world; a legacy this new production was created to preserve.

THE SHOW

The Celebration was built around John Lodge's vision of carrying the music forward. Music director Alan Hewitt and Jon Davison helped bring that vision to the stage, joined by longtime bandmates Billy Ashbaugh, Duffy King, and Jason Charboneau in a production that preserves the spirit of The Moody Blues while allowing the music to continue reaching new audiences. Beautifully paced and thoughtfully crafted, the production balanced powerful performances with striking visuals and seamless transitions, creating an immersive concert experience from beginning to end.

Davison handled vocals and bass with both conviction and warmth, while Hewitt led from the keyboards with rich orchestral arrangements. Duffy King on guitar, Billy Ashbaugh on drums, another veteran of the Moody Blues touring band, and Jason Charboneau on cello completed the lineup, each contributing to a performance that felt polished, dynamic, and deeply connected to the music.

Throughout the evening, John himself remained on screen, singing alongside the band that now carries his musical legacy forward.

The music moved through "Slide Zone," "Saved By The Music," "Peak Hour," "Lean On Me," "The Voice," "Emily's Song," and "Gemini Dream." The moment that stayed with me was "Isn't Life Strange." The bass anchored the song while the keyboards soared above it, both stretching the arrangement between earth and sky.

Friday night, it served as a reminder of why The Moody Blues' music has endured for nearly six decades. Its melodies remain as sweeping as ever, while its lyrics continue to speak across generations with remarkable intimacy.

The first set closed the only way it could, with "I'm Just a Singer (In a Rock and Roll Band)," John's own declaration, sung back to the screen by a full house.

GRAEME'S PROMISE

After intermission came the sequence that gave the second half its emotional center. Shortly before founding drummer Graeme Edge passed in 2021, John spoke with him about revisiting Days of Future Passed. He asked Graeme to record his poetry from the album so that Graeme would always be on stage with him. That conversation became the album Days of Future Passed: My Sojourn, and the second half opened with "The Day Begins," the reimagined orchestral introduction from that album, featuring John and Graeme reciting Graeme's poem "Morning Glory."

Two voices, both now gone, opening the second half of a concert neither could attend in body. The recording fulfilled the promise John made years earlier. It felt less like a memorial and more like a conversation that never ended, reminding the audience that the spirit of The Moody Blues has always been larger than any single performance.

From there, the band moved through "The Sunset," "Story in Your Eyes," "Candle of Life," "Legend of a Mind," and "Tuesday Afternoon," before flowing into "Evening (Time to Get Away)" and "Late Lament," with Graeme Edge's recorded narration once again becoming part of the live performance.

Then came "Nights in White Satin."

Some songs never lose their ability to stop time, and this remains one of them. As the final notes filled the theater, it became clear why the music of The **Moody Blues** Moody continues to resonate with audiences around the world.

The encore brought the room back to its feet. "Ride My See-Saw" sent us out into the Clearwater night the way John would have wanted: loud, joyful, and still moving.

The Moody Blues built a career on songs that explored time, memory, hope, and the human spirit. Friday night's world premiere proved

those songs remain every bit as powerful today. The John Lodge Celebration wasn't about looking back; it was about carrying one of rock's most extraordinary musical legacies into its next chapter. Happy birthday, John. The music kept the faith.



