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the
PIT

nine inch nails

TRENT REZNOR

Madison Square Garden, New York City, NY
December 9, 1994

Nine Inch Nails' powerful stage antics and brash music has been thrilling club and theater audiences since 1990, making the band the premier industrial-rock act on the underground circuit. But it's not just Goths and punkers going to NIN shows anymore. The band's latest album, *The Downward Spiral*, with its radio and MTV hits, has opened NIN's music to a huge mainstream audience. Trent Reznor and Co. is now an *arena band* (a rarity in alternative circles, and all but unheard of for an industrial outfit).

So how would Nine Inch Nails, with a stage show tailor-made for small theaters, fare in an arena the size and stature of New York's Madison Square Garden? Well, things didn't look promising from the opening act's performance. The Jim Rose Circus Sideshow, a blast to see in a small theater or club, was just dwarfed by the Garden's massive stage. But when Trent Reznor and Nine Inch Nails made their entrance, they squashed any and all fears of the band being overwhelmed by the size of the venue. Unlike most arena rock acts, which *require* a mammoth light show and set to take control of a big hall, the Nine Inch Nails went straight for the jugular with their music, rendering 19,000 people dazed, helpless and loving every minute of the onslaught.

Delivering a good stage show is generally no great feat (nothing a few expensive props can't handle), but the ability to completely take over a giant venue is a rare quality in rock today. While NIN's overuse of pulsating lights, dense smoke and a set of ancient ruins gave the band instant stage presence, its true power as a live act was quickly realized as all persons within earshot became slaves to the hypnotic force that projected off the stage and ricocheted throughout the arena.

Driving, energetic guitar songs like "Wish," "Mr. Self Destruct" and "March Of The Pigs" beat audience members into submission, while claustrophobic mind-fucks like "Piggy," "Closer" and "Dead Soul" sent an eerie chill throughout the venue. But regardless of the brand of medicine being administered, the captivatingly wild (borderline violent) antics of front-man Trent Reznor never allowed the audience—or his band—to slip from his grasp. Or for that matter, breathe.

Midway through this thermonuclear explosion of a concert, a massive, translucent movie screen descended from high above the band, shielding the entire stage from view. For the twenty minutes that followed, the audience was assaulted from all angles by a disturbing collection of film clips while the band droned on in the background. Animals decomposing in black and white time-lapse photography, scenes of human death and destruction, war, the Holocaust and just about any other atrocity ever caught on film was flashed on the screen with machine-gun quickness. It wasn't long before everyone in the Garden stood there, eyes firmly fixated on the screen and jaws to the floor, unable to turn away from the cinematic horror—and practically unaware that the band was still playing.

And when the smoke finally cleared, people filed out of the Garden feeling as though they had been assaulted continuously for two hours—and knowing full well that they had just witnessed the most spectacular arena show to hit New York City in years.

—Jeff Klits

B.J. Papas