

The night, in 1980, when Paul Simon bought me a drink

Written by Andy Owen



Actually, not just me.

He bought a drink for everyone in the Hammersmith Odeon on the evening of November 7th 1980.

Staggering, but true.

Paul was in town, promoting his latest album - One Trick Pony - the soundtrack to his new film of the same name. The movie featured Paul in the role of a once-famous rock musician, Jonah Lewin, struggling on the road as he nobly plies his trade.

*"He's a one-trick pony, one trick is all that horse can do
He does one trick only, it's the principal source of his revenue
But when he steps into the spotlight, you can feel the heat of his heart
Come rising through..."*

Lewin wants to record a new album, but a less-than-sympathetic record company and producer (played by Lou Reed), aren't making things easy for him. At the same time, Lewin is trying to resolve issues with his wife and child.

Paul's band for this tour, was truly awesome.

Tony Levin on bass, Richard Tee on keyboards, Steve Gadd on drums and Eric Gale on guitar. Paul had played with this crew many times and they were featured as his backing band in the film.

Also supporting on certain numbers, were the Jessie Dixon singers.

Paul opened the concert with, Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard - and the first set also included, Still Crazy After All These Years, Ace in the Hole, You're Kind, Something So Right, Slip Slidin' Away, One-Trick Pony, Jonah, 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover, Late in the Evening and finally, American Tune.

There was to be an intermission before the second set.

American Tune - a classic Simon song - was just Paul and his guitar - and, before he started it, he told us that we had been a fantastic audience and he wished he could repay us in some way.

Immediately, some wag in the audience shouted out - "You can, Paul. Buy us all a drink". This was greeted with much laughter, but Paul looked straight away to the side of the stage and said "Can we do that?", to someone standing there.

A short discussion took place, then he played the song. At the end of the song he took his applause and then told us to go to the bar and buy a drink and he will pick up the tab.

I think a lot of us thought it was a stunt. But it wasn't. The bar during the interval was utter chaos, but we got our drinks and it didn't cost us a penny. Paul paid for it all. Apparently, it cost him over \$2,000.

When he came back on for the second set, he had a drink in his hand and raised it to us. We responded with a standing ovation.

He opened up the second set, with Kodachrome, followed by, Have a Good Time, I Do It for Your Love, Loves Me Like a Rock, Some Folks' Lives Roll Easy, Jesus on the Mainline, What Do You Call Him, Bridge Over Troubled Water, Gone at Last, The Boxer, Cecilia / Rivers of Babylon / Amazing Grace.

Two encores followed, with Mrs. Robinson, The Sound of Silence, Long, Long Day and Late in the Evening (again).

It was a magnificent gig. One I still remember fondly. And the only gig I have ever been to, where the artist said 'thank you', in the form of a drink.

A final note: One Trick Pony performed only modestly at the box office and didn't stick around too long. The soundtrack LP, released at the same time as the movie, did much better. The album broke into the U.S. Top 20, selling over a half a million copies. The single, "Late in the Evening," made the Top 10 and was nominated for a Grammy.