

Rock of Love II: Preserved in Ambre



My unhealthy relationship with Bret Michaels and his Rock of Love tour de force mirrors any impure pursuit: obsessive love, drug addiction, a nibbling on the ear which progresses into full-blown cannibalism.

When I first reported on the reality show, it was with the confident voice of one who had not yet fallen. I mocked the tacky clothes, vile rituals of Hessian courtship, and the carp-lipped cad at the center of VH1's top rated program. So how was it that I found myself at the Oneida Casino in Green Bay, Wisconsin, shoulder-to-sweaty-shoulder with hundreds of pulsating fans throwing up the three-fingered international sign for Satanism as Michaels warbled through a hoarse-voiced rendition of "Sweet Home Alabama?"

Mimicking the formula of *The Bachelor*, Rock of Love featured the former Poison front-man and a police line-up of busted broads itching for a chance to capture the heart of the bandanna'd libertine. When piqued by a special lady he asked, "Would you continue to stay in this house and *rock my world*?" and when a trollop let him down or was just at "the wrong place at the wrong time," he said, "I'm sorry, but the tour ends here."

During the course of the show, Michaels practiced frottage against the leg of every willing female contestant and proceeded to, as he said repeatedly, "suck face" with the lot of them (hey kids, "suck face" is a grandpa term from yesteryear that means "to kiss" brought into the public lexicon via the film *On Golden Pond*, which you probably haven't seen. The important information to glean from this explanation is that Bret Michaels is OLD! If you count the rings of his neck flesh, he's one hundred and nine.)

Through competitions that included a peep-show, muddy short-shorts football tournament, roller derby relay, and bikini-clad salute to veterans, Michaels was able to narrow the field to two worthy women: Daisy De La Hoya and Ambre [sic-if you're like me, you will insist on pronouncing it Am-Bra] Lake.

My fellow watched the final elimination under duress wearing the eye clamps from *A Clockwork Orange*. As I twisted my fingers on the couch, leaping up to exclaim, "Oh no she DIDN'T!" and "Come on Bret, grow a spine!" he shook his head, loosing a little respect for his beloved.

Upon seeing finalist Daisy De La Hoya, he asked, "Is that a man?" Daisy is a robotic conglomeration of attractive components assembled into, as Project Runway's Christian would say, "a hot tranny mess!" With lank extensions, a perpetually petulant collagen-plumped mouth, and pair of discount implants struggling to bust through her sternum, Daisy is an odd collage of "sexy parts" that never quite composes anything erotic.

Her rival, Ambre (also pron. Ambree like jamboree), is mostly natural and thirty-seven years old. That's practically a corpse in rock years! She's a hearty-hipped, small-chested Midwestern gal with a goody-goody attitude spiced up by uncomfortable attempts to be seductive. Who could forget her desperate confession on the final date in Mexico? "I'm not wearing underwear." To which Bret responded, "Check please!"

NOTE: He said the exact same thing on his date with Daisy and during his one-on-one time with Heather last season. When Bret says "Check please!" he is indicating the immediate sexual desire he feels while simultaneously suggesting that the girl in question is Whore #419 on his hit list.

By the light of a Cancun moon, in a ridiculous papier-mâché set version of Chitza Nitza, Bret Michaels chose Ambre (also pron. Am-bray), a woman in her thirties with a real job and ability to string together coherent sentences, over the buoyant stripper Daisy. I felt it was a victory for women nationwide!

"You see," I explained to my fellow (now struggling with the ropes that kept him hostage before the TV) "Bret is at that point in life where he wants something more. He's got the diabetes, he's getting older, he needs someone who can really be there for him."

And there it was. I had crossed the line; all humor and irony gone. I invested in Rock of Love and felt vindicated by Bret's decision. Women of strength and stature were worth something. Smarts and experience counted!

My intrepid editor made a few calls, and waiting for me at the Oneida Casino were two tickets to the Bret Michaels Rock of Love concert. As my fellow and I whisked through the line to enter the sold-out show, poor stragglers stood outside the ropes with signs begging "Tickets! Please!"

I wondered who the Bret Michaels fans could be. In 1986, when Poison's *Look What the Cat Dragged In* was released, I remember seeing shows at an isolated punk club called The Outhouse in a Lawrence, Kansas cornfield where six people wearing black avoided each other as Laughing Hyenas, Sonic Youth, or some other underground indie band, screamed two hours worth of art-house despair. I never paid attention to radio ready glam rock with its big-haired sex-drugs-and-rock-and-roll vibe. Maybe I had missed something.

Songs by Ratt, Bryan Adams, and Guns-N-Roses prepared the crowd for Bret Michaels. My fellow pointed to the drum kit and banner reading "B.M.". He asked, "Medically, doesn't BM stand for *bowel movement*?"

Big John, the stoic security figure from Rock of Love, introduced his master and as the strains of "Talk Dirty To Me" throbbed through the crowd, Michaels emerged in his full glory: painted-on jeans with leather trim lacing up the sides, an artfully cut t-shirt, cheap cowboy hat, and omnipresent bandana. The crowd erupted.

The last of the mulleted rockers pumped their fists in solidarity. Gaggles of office workers doomed to cubicle confines were unleashed in the rock arena. Hairdressers with crispy claw-bangs from twenty years ago primped on the sidelines. Cute girls from the college who had raided their parent's record collections gyrated to Poison hits.

Rock of Love fans held up signs requesting "Rock of Love III" (presumably to feature the sign-bearers). Date couples comprised of short nervous fellows squiring tall temptresses with radioactive orange spray tans loitered in the lobby. Most enchantingly, Mother/daughter teams in matching Poison shirts clutched each other; perhaps the dewy-eyed mother recalling her first Poison show when her daughter was drunkenly conceived in a rock club bathroom and the daughter finally understanding "Every Rose Has Its Thorn."

There was no posing solipsism or disdainful sarcasm in the room. Bandanas were blazing in hard-rock homage and flickering lighters symbolized the eternal flame of metal music still burning in the hearts of acolytes. I wanted in.

In the midst of it all, Michaels emerged affable and engaging. He bantered with the audience, suggesting the show was like a backyard barbeque. He pointed randomly as he sang, creating the sensation that he was acknowledging individual audience members ("He was totally pointing at ME!") and brought Packer players on stage for his "Nothin' But A Good Time" finale. He made self-deprecating remarks about Rock of Love, then charmed us all by saying, "Hey, I chose a girl from right here in the Midwest!"

As I rode home in stunned silence, I experienced nostalgia for a time I had never known. It was an era fossilized, preserved in amber, that I could only imagine anthropologically.

I wanted to go back to 1986 and drive around in someone's older brother's borrowed Trans Am cranking up Poison as the wind blew through my ozone-depleting hair-do. I

wanted to make a Budweiser can pyramid at the lake, watching metal boys with wispy hair and puny moustaches dive head-first into shallow water as Bret Michaels sang about heartbreak and loss.

Rounding the corner of my neighborhood, the mood had passed. “That was a really bad concert,” my fellow said. He was right. Like Daisy, the songs were generic and infantile. Like Ambre, the melodies were struggling to appear young. I thought back to Bret’s parting words to each contestant dismissed on Rock of Love and concluded that my investment in his show, his music, and his romantic life was over.

Bret, it was just the wrong place at the wrong time. Your tour ends here.