



Live review: Rebelution at Black Sheep

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Rebelution, Passafire, Giant Panda Guerilla Dub Squad, at Black Sheep, 10.2.09

By Bill Reed

Hands were in the air. Heads were bobbing. Hips were shaking to and fro. The happy, beach party, reggae rock of **Rebelution** filled the Black Sheep on Friday night, and the crowd was ready to embrace the carefree party vibe.

Rebelution first formed to play college parties, and the California quartet carried that feel into the packed-out room. And they didn't come alone.

The four-hour show gave a tour of contemporary takes on the reggae beat, from the full-on rock of **Passafire**, to the rootsier attack of the **Giant Panda Guerilla Dub Squad**, to Rebelution's closing set.

Passafire started off with reggae elements, but then descended into instrumental freakouts that sounded more like punk. The band plays at the edges of reggae, infusing the sounds into their rock mix, and the result was pretty great.



Giant Panda went the other direction, bringing out a squad of six – including an organ and a piano – and gave a loving shout-out to reggae roots. They were less poppy, going with long but relaxed instrumental interludes, and the reggae beat was never absent.

Giant Panda also leaned on more socially conscious lyrics, singing “I don’t want blood on my hands, I need food on my table.” Rebelution was the main attraction.

The crowd pushed forward, danced like crazy, and most fans could recite the band’s lyrics when lead singer **Eric Rachmany** held out the mic on songs from their debut “Courage to Grow” and recent release “Bright Side of Life.”

Rebelution whips reggae, rock, pop and hip-hop into a party concoction. Reggae purists might barely recognize the music, but that’s not their fan base. This is pop-reggae, and the hooks are so catchy that it’s futile to resist.

Rachmany and bass player **Marley D. Williams** were also charismatic performers – they seemed magnetically attracted to the front of the stage where they were encircled by fans’ hands. Their presence overcame deficiencies like the whine in Rachmany’s voice and tinny keyboard solos. It’s hard to have the mission of delivering positive messages to young fans and be cool at the same time, but Rebelution has done it.

While I usually like more longing or angst in my music, sometimes it’s nice to chill out, have a cold one, and party for the night. Rebelution is the band for that.

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