

love-in with 'the pasha of passion'



By Dave Becker
STAFF WRITER

It's been a tough week, baby. What with the O.J. thing and fires popping up all over and who knows what kind of personal trouble in your life, you probably have a lot of stress to deal with.

You need a break, a chance to relax, to get away. You need love, baby, and Barry White's here to give it to you.

The maestro of Make-Out Music, the Sultan of Bedroom Soul eased into the Concord Pavilion on Friday to begin a two-night Bay Area run — tickets are still available for tonight's Shoreline show. These were originally scheduled for last August but postponed due to illness. (Can you imagine what he sounds like with a head cold?)

REVIEW

In the midst of a remarkable comeback with the double-platinum album "The Icon Is Love" and the No. 1 single

"Practice What You Preach," White pulled out all the stops with the kind of stage show most artists are too cheap or too chicken too offer these days.

Besides the huge Love Unlimited Orchestra backing him up — a 14-piece string section, 12-piece backing band, three singers and four dancers who apparently went wild with the Frederick's of Hollywood catalogue for costume ideas — the stage design itself was something a marvel. A giant headboard made the whole thing look like a massive sequined bed. Unfortunately, there was no room for the giant champagne glasses that have graced other stops on the tour.

Combine the visual effect and the sheer power of the large group with White's smooth and slow delivery, and the concert was one long love groove. Whether he was rumbling through an older hit such as "Can't Get Enough of Your Love, Babe" or dishing up a new bon-bon like "Baby's Home," there was a certain magnetism to White that did not elude the

RAY CHAVEZ — Staff
Concord Pavilion.

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predominantly female and very vocal audience.

The major part of it is White's voice, a deep, rumbling tone so low in the register the singer is more likely to crack building foundations than shatter crystal. Combine that voice with a delivery that's somewhere between unhurried and sleepy, and you've got a style that would sound sexy if he was reading the ingredients off a jar of taco sauce.

No wonder, then, that half of the fun Friday was hearing the Mastodon of Love ad-lib between and before songs, uttering statements like:

"Making love is such a peaceful, perfect feeling."

"We men have a bad habit of being in a hurry. Never rush. Always take your time."

"Relax, I'll take control. Just lay back. We've got a lot of making up to do."

"You want to play with me?"

When Barry started out in the early 1970s, before there was a self-help section in bookstores, the romantic advice and inspiration of songs like "It's Ecstasy When You Lay Down Next to Me" were as close as most folks were going to get to a sex therapist.

The tunes still have a certain power to them, especially with the

TICKETS

- > Barry White
- > 7:30 tonight
- > Shoreline Amphitheatre, 1 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View
- > \$19.50, \$27.50 and \$35
- > 762-BASS

bass turned up loud enough so that it felt like every seat had a personal Magic Fingers massage unit. Even though the Barry White magic is still best experienced in the privacy of one's own living room, the Pasha of Passion does have a peculiar kind of charisma as a live performer.

There's also a significant kitsch factor to the Barry White experience, heightened by recent image-tweaking appearance on "The Simpsons" and David Letterman's show.

There's a fine line between corn and porn, cheesy and sleazy, and White kept jumping from one side to the other Friday. It's hard to decide whether "There It Is," which had his half-naked dancers crawling around on velvet chaises while the Maestro described his undressing technique, was the high or low point of the whole experience.

Parents, do yourself a favor if you're going to tonight's show: Find a baby-sitter.