

A slice in time from another era

BY BRIAN LOCKHART

Oakland Coliseum Stadium ? July 2, 1977

Temperature around 80 degrees F. Clear skies and a bright sunny day.

Billy Powell starts to play the opening piano riff of Free Bird and 80,000 fans react to the familiar tune that has been receiving steady air play since it was released on Lynyrd Skynyrd's debut album in 1973.

Lynyrd Skynyrd was sharing the stage during one of the infamous Day on the Green Concerts that ran for over 20 years in Oakland, California.

Peter Frampton, Santana, and the Outlaws also performed on that day.

As guitarist Allen Collins goes into the familiar opening guitar solo, a bevy of beautiful young girls in the first couple of rows in front of the stage, all around 19 or 20 something, and all wearing halter tops, wave their arms and revel in the performance and the excitement of the entire event.

The crowd behind them fills the ground of the stadium and the seats that surround the Coliseum.

Ronnie Van Zant, attired in his trademark hat and not so glamorous T-shirt starts to sing ?If I leave here tomorrow, would you still remember me?? in his distinctive southern twangy style.

The song finishes with a guitar finale that lasts almost five minutes in a song that is around 12 minutes from start to finish.

It is one of my favourite music performances captured on film and 42 years later, it is remarkably well preserved.

Other than the clothing styles it looks like it was shot yesterday.

Three months after this performance, Lynyrd Skynyrd entered the annals of rock history when their aircraft ran out of gas and crashed in a heavily wooded area of Mississippi.

Lead sing Ronnie Van Zant died on impact ? and so did the voice and sound of the band. Guitarist Steve Gaines, his sister, backup singer, Cassie Gaines, assistant road manger Dean Kilpatrick, and the pilot and co-pilot of the craft also died.

Everyone who survived the crash was seriously injured.

The crash area was so remote, two of the band members who were also seriously injured, staggered through the deep woods looking for help and to report the crash.

They finally stumbled across a farmer who demanded to know why two disheveled characters were trespassing on his land. When he realized what had happened he called for help.

It was later found out that the aircraft, when for sale, was considered by another band as their touring airplane. Their air crew inspected the plane and deemed it not airworthy and in bad shape. The band passed up the sale and it was later sold to the Lynyrd Skynyrd band.

It was a fatal mistake.

The film is a slice in time of an event in a different era.

In the comments below the video, one guy makes reference to the good looking girls in the front row. Another guy agreed then pointed out that those girls are all in their 60's now.

From that reference a girl told of spotting her grandmother in the crowd. She showed her mother the video and she spotted HER mother in the video.

Wow, time flies.

The reference to Lynrd Skynyrd may be lost on some younger people. The band did continue on, but without Ronnie Van Zant, it was like the Rolling Stones without Mick.

The film is from a time defined by a unique clothing style and music style that has pretty much disappeared. The only time you hear live music from the 70's is when you see a band made up of guys who grew up in that era and still have a band and perform 'classic' rock, as it is now called.

I still like music from that time but there has been 40 years of new music since then and I don't like to be stuck in a long-ago decade. Some guys I knew in high school still play Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd at parties. Somehow if I'm at a gathering and suddenly the Doobie Brothers are the musical entertainment, I figure I'm at the wrong party!

Time is fleeting.

I watch all these videos currently being shot around the world of events both good and bad, and think that maybe 40 years from now, someone will see an old video of Justin Bieber performing on stage and say 'Hey, that's my grandmother in the front row!'