

U2 puts on a rock 'n' roll show

U2 - At the Worcester Centrum, Tuesday night.

By Brett Milano
Special to The Globe

U2 attracts one of rock 'n' roll's most devoted audiences. A U2 crowd does more than jump and shout: They bring Irish flags and peace banners, they drop to dead silence in the slow numbers, they sing in perfect time when singer Bono leads a chant. The band returns the warmth, making the audience feel like an important part of the show.

This week's Centrum show was heavy in audience participation: Bono made frequent trips to the front rows, led chants and singalongs, even let a fan play guitar for the encore. But those moments never got in the way of the music. This year's tour - which returned to Worcester this week after a quick sellout last winter - features some of the most adventurous music the group has ever made.

The key to the new sound is U2's latest album, "The Unforgettable Fire." Though uneven on record, the new songs were played with more confidence onstage, providing the show's most dramatic moments. "MLK," a hymn-like tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, featured a subtly effective Bono vocal, backed only by Dave "The Edge" Evans' quiet synthesizers. The album's title song was another standout, jumping from keyboard calm to slide-guitar fury.

U2's presentation was simpler



LEAD SINGER BONO
More politically outspoken

GLOBE PHOTO BY CHRIS FITZGERALD

than usual: The stage was nearly bare, and the slides of Belfast riots, which illustrated previous tours, were missing. But Bono was more politically outspoken than ever: "A Sort of Homecoming," played while the lights formed an Irish flag pattern, was sung "in the hope that we can become one country." The antinuclear anthem "Seconds" was dedicated to President Reagan; and "Pride (In

the Name of Love)" was dedicated "To anyone who's fought the racist government in South Africa."

But there were also moments of upbeat rock 'n' roll joy. After a string of political numbers, "Two Hearts Beat As One" turned to an elated, romantic mood. And the band's first hit, "I Will Follow," featured solid drumming from Larry Mullen and flashy guitar leads from The Edge.

As usual, Bono was a convincing, charismatic showman. During the frantic "Wire," he was so animated that a team of roadies had to follow him around the stage, untangling his mike. But he showed a gentler side on "Bad," the best of the newer songs. Written for an old friend who'd become addicted to heroin, it turned into a more general message of friendship. When a fan jumped onstage, Bono held her tight instead of chasing her away.

The night's only problem was a technical near-disaster. Early in the show, a lighting rig started slipping from its perch above the audience, and nearly fell into the front rows. Both the band and the road crew had to think fast: While the roadies fixed the cables, U2 stopped playing and made sure that the audience got safely out of the way. "Don't worry," said Bono, "We're going to have a rock 'n' roll show if we have to wait all night."