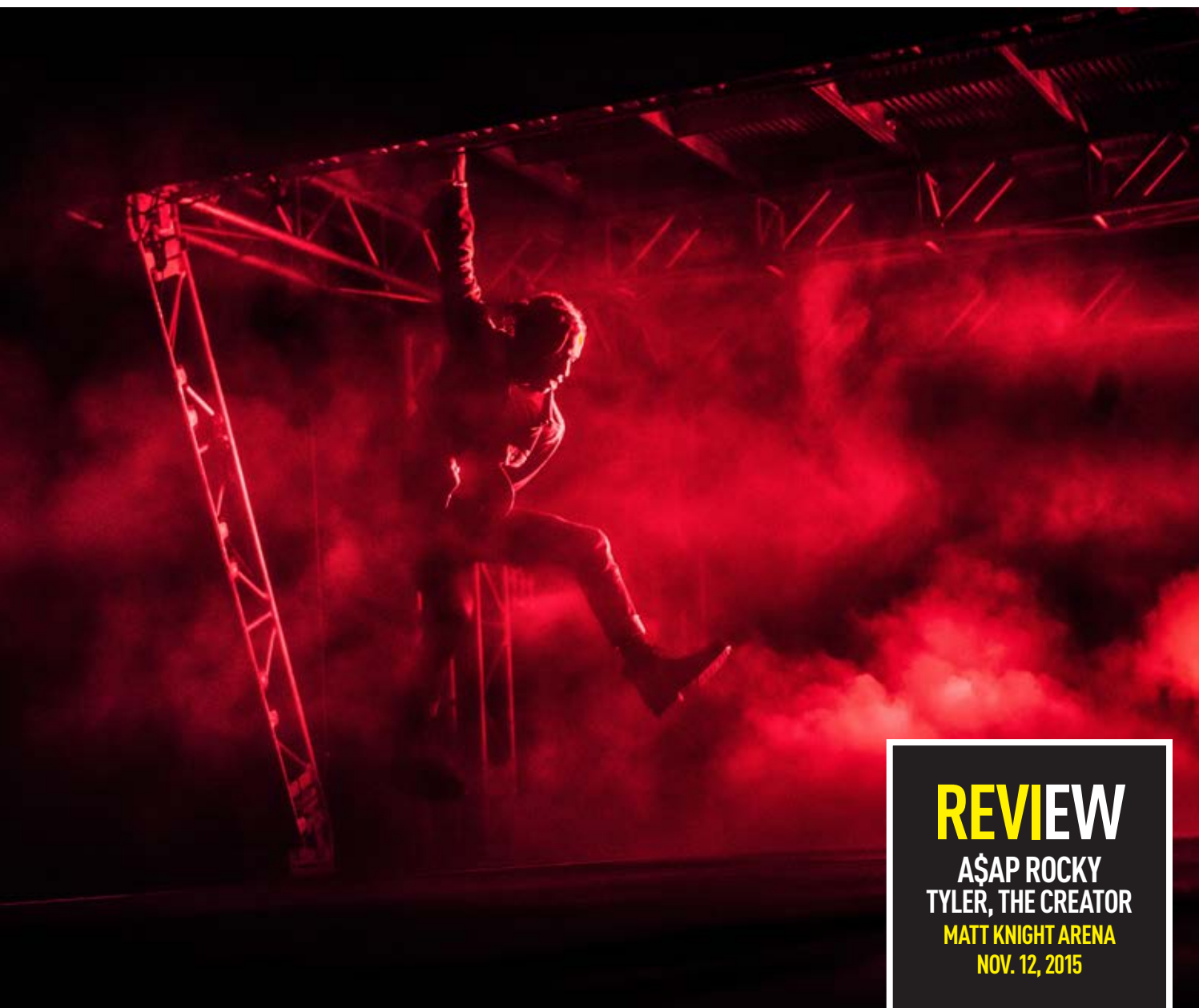




REVIEW

A\$AP ROCKY
TYLER, THE CREATOR

MATT KNIGHT ARENA
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I have seen, now, the eye of a storm — the perilous tremor of full-blast thrusters, the sound of 10,000 white hands clapping. I have witnessed a prophet addressing his subjects. I have seen an earthquake's living heart. The epicenter: **A\$AP Rocky.**

Thursday night, Nov. 12, the Harlem-born rapper stepped onto the stage at Matt Knight Arena to a roar so deafening, so decibel-stretching, that a lesser man might have cowered in fear. Thankfully, hip-hop's latest success story is one of experience. After performing extensively with Drake and Kendrick, A\$AP Rocky — born Rakim Mayers — is touring solo. Well, almost solo. He brought with him the ever-brilliant and magnanimous troll **Tyler, The Creator.** This decision was well advised. After a full-set's worth of Tyler's music (which I love, and forever will love), A\$AP Rocky had a bar to reach. The crowd was so hot that a single flicked bic might have sent us up in a sweaty inferno.

Shit. He took the bar and curled it one-handed.

A\$AP Rocky's sophomore release *At. Long. Last. A\$AP* (RCA Records, 2015) is, at first glance, your average trap-heavy rap album. But the more you listen, the more you find the soul in its crannies. The record is brutal in all the right places. It's hard, sleek and bitterly honest. These aspects translate on stage to create a spectacle so far beyond what the average hip-hop show should accomplish that I was left, in the end, with a hole in my gut.

Perhaps the pile-driving bass was to blame. But I'm convinced, now, that greater forces were at work. A melding, let's call it, of potential and kinetic energies. An atmosphere of love and respect fostered over each dirty beat. Yes, the beats *were* dirty. But I have a penchant for language and word. Many factors make up a great show but, in the end, only one thing matters: The artist says what he means to say.

The set was really grooving along — a spitfire's pace — bangers and bangers of floor-shaking mayhem. But right there, at the crux of it all, with the crowd so alive in the palm of his hand that he physically moved the blood through our veins, Mayers decided to put things on pause. With mic poised, he laid bare his thoughts with a brief sermon about humanity. His message was this: Race, religion, color or creed, every human is striving, simply, just to exist. To *feel alive*. Also, let's be honest, smoking weed is pretty great. But more to the point, every one of us — male, female, blue, green or pink — *deserves* to be here, grasping this moment.

Shoulders back, chest protruding, arms flung wide in charged embrace, A\$AP Rocky drew the arena into his heart from a spot some 20 feet in the air. Tier-two of his three-tiered stage — some kind of light-up hashtag, a tic-tac-toe of metal and lights. A hip-hop Fuck You to *Hollywood Squares*. Columns of steam rose to the rafters. My eyes twitched inside my skull. Then the lights went down.

When the lights go down, you feel for a second the gravitational pull of the earth. The soles of your shoes are held to the ground. Your knees buckle. The roar pitches up.

At long last, the bass returns. ■