

# PASS THE AUX

## Barenaked Ladies, Better Than Ezra turn back the clock at Greek Theatre

📅 June 20, 2018 👤 Ezra Salkin

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How much mileage can decades-old bands get from a select few sizable hits—especially when those hits came out 20 years prior? The answer, which the trifecta of **Barenaked Ladies**, **Better Than Ezra**, and **KT Tunstall** provided

this past Friday at Griffith Park's historic [Greek Theatre](#), is in the performance.

While you're not likely to find any of the above artists on any definitive list of "greatest live" performers, skeptics can glean from the fans that these groups live off the connections they forge on brisk summer nights like this, during the Los Angeles stopover. The concert was part 2018 iteration of what's become the now semi-routine Barenaked Ladies' Last Summer On Earth tour.

Throughout the near sold out, feel-good show at the open-air amphitheater, the artists delivered big with their mix of inventive covers, new songs, and expected oldie-but-goodies in addition to good-natured banter that's become a mainstay of Better Than Ezra and Barenaked ladies performances.

That crowd, from the looks of it, were probably young adults or approaching adulthood at the time these artists landed their biggest hits. In the case of Barenaked Ladies and Better Than Ezra, that was the early to mid-90s. For KT Tunstall it was the mid-ish 2000s.

With that, the Australian-born [KT Tunstall](#) set the tone early with her 2005 breadwinner "Suddenly I See," a song my memory associates with the sound track to nearly every romcom of the era, and it has managed to stick around as a totem for women's empowerment. Hillary Clinton, for instance, used it in 2008 as one of her main campaign anthems. In a crowd mostly belonging to the headliners, cadres of fawning women could be seen on their feet as everyone else slowly filtered in.

Next came [Better Than Ezra](#) — a band whose unexplained name is thrown up at me during new introductions to this day. When cofounder and front man Kevin Griffin said somewhat self-deprecatingly "Now this is the song that started this rock and roll juggernaut you see before you," the crowd knew Griffin could only be talking about their 1995 upbeat earworm "Good" and the track that shot the band from obscurity to Billboard Modern Rock's number 1 spot. That song more than any other filled my head with reminiscences from that decade, namely, summer camp.

After segueing into some inspired Rush, Third Eye Blind, and Black Sabbath covers and impersonations, Griffin and the rest got back to some of his next known tracks, the grungier "Desperately Wanting" and "In the Blood." Everything the quintessential 90s' group knows, after all this time, "comes from the *Breakfast Club* soundtrack," Griffin joked.

When the [Barenaked Ladies](#) finally made their way to the stage, they came out to "Odds Are." Lead vocalist Ed Robertson quickly called for a "Greek Chorus" of the song's main refrain: "Odds are we gonna be alright, odds are we gonna be alright for another night," and he got it. Lest anyone was dragged here by their boy or girlfriend, he said.

More oldies followed: "Say What You Will," "Pinch Me," and the massive 1998 college rock hit, "One Week." All those things I kept hearing from fans about their band's stellar crowd engagement and even the underlying "smart ass" quotient in their songs showed up pretty quickly. At one point, Robertson riffed into a melodramatic spoof rapping "Rockstar" by 22-year-old rapper Post Malone, which saw the audience laughing out loud.

I was surprised to learn how prolific the Canadian favorites have been the last several years, as they mixed in tracks from their latest 2017 album, *Fake Nudes*. The LP name is a satirical jab at Trump's incessant "fake news"

philippics.

The first of those new songs was “20/20 hindsight,” a sentimental but pretty conventional rock ballad, followed by the more folksy “Canada Dry” (cowritten by Kevin Griffin), a humorous take on the Canadian good life. “We can’t give this shit away,” Robertson said, facetiously, of the new stuff.

Later, in a move that succeeded in getting an already adoring audience to eat out of his hand, as well as an ode to the band’s lengthy existence (“We’ve been a band since you were a zygote,” bassist James Creeggan said at one point), a beaming Robertson called his 22-year-old daughter up for a cutesy rendition of the band’s 2013 release “Smile.”

At the end of it all, after bringing back up both KT Tunstall and Kevin Griffin for one song each, after hours of play, despite the early summer chill, the crowd wasn’t quite done. The ultra crowd-conscious band feigned an exit, but no one bought it. The guys returned for one last set, beginning with their 1996 “The Old Apartment”—a song about the external maintenance that goes into keeping up a relationship. My second favorite of the night.

*Words by [Ezra Salkin](#)*

*Photos by [Tim Aarons](#)*

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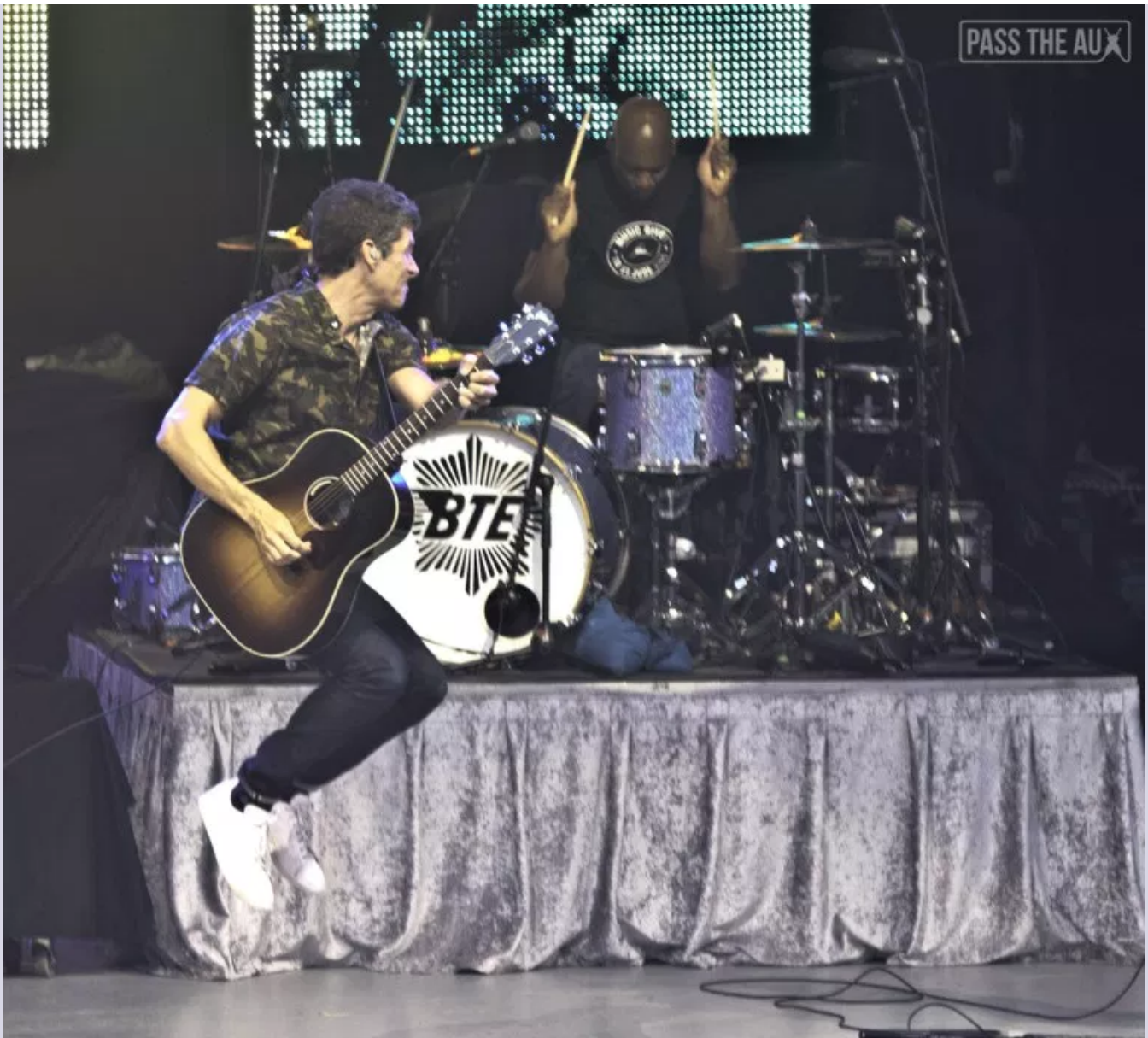




**BETTER THAN EZRA:**

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Barenaked Ladies - One Week (Video)

**BARENAKED LADIES**  
**"ONE WEEK"**  
 SPECIAL MUSIC VIDEO

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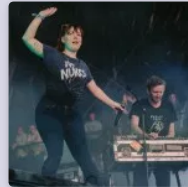
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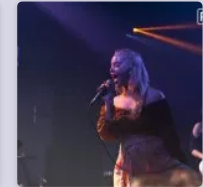
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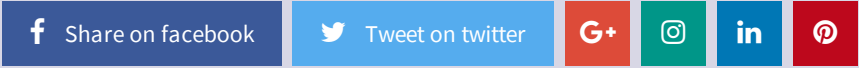
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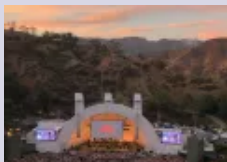
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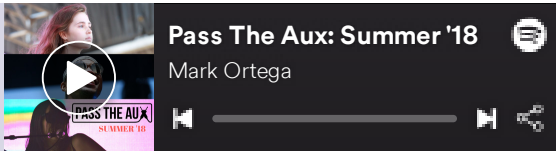


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Mark Ortega



- 1 you should see me in a crown 3:00  
Billie Eilish
- 2 Under the Sun 3:46  
Roosevelt
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Metric
- 4 Bad Timing 3:52  
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Anderson .Paak, Busta Rhymes

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