

The Last Time I Saw Jackson

by Fred Osuna

The last time I saw Jackson, his heart did not seem warm and gay.

The last time I saw Jackson was not in Detroit in '68.

The last time I saw Jackson Browne, he was clean shaven. This time he had a slight beard. And I don't mean a "shadow," but a true beard. Not like Santa, more like George Clooney in *Syriana*. And white, a beard flecked with white hair. Again, not like Santa, like George Clooney in *Syriana*.

The last time I saw Jackson was ten years ago, or more. I feel ten years older than I did then. I wonder if he does. He looks ten years older now. Maybe it's the beard. He doesn't sound ten years older.

The last time I saw Jackson, his concert was outdoors. Then, my seat wasn't very close to the stage. I'd have had to yell really loud for him to hear me from that distance. Really really loud, in fact, to have been heard above the roar of drunken slobs yelling "REDNECK FRIEND!!" This time, at an inside venue, I could have directed a "Play what you want!" at him in my upper-limit inside voice, and he would have heard me with ease. I'm happy that I didn't, though. The fellow in the crowd who did get dealt this snarky little gem: "I always play what I want." My concert companion turned to me near the end of the show and said, "I bet he hates having to play 'Running on Empty' every night." "Dude," says I, "Didn't you hear him? He wants to play it!" Uh huh.

The last time I saw Jackson was in the 20th century. Then, he'd been a practicing musician for about thirty years. Now, we are eight years into the 21st century. Only twelve of the twenty-two songs Jackson played this time were from his 20th century albums (roughly, 54% of them). Know how many 20th century songs he sang the last time I saw Jackson Browne? That's right. I could've majored in math.

The last time I saw Jackson, I didn't write down the set list. This time I didn't write down the set list, either. Instead, I borrowed my friend's cell phone and texted the set list to myself. In four installments. Very 21st century.

The last time I saw Jackson, I spoke to him. The last time I saw Jackson was outside his tour bus door, where I was gathered with about five friends. It was dark and the engine of the bus was running. Jackson appeared, walking toward us from around the back of the bus. Our conversations stopped abruptly, creating a few awkward seconds of unaccompanied bus noise. He walked right to us and stood, nearly silent, as each of us complimented him on that night's show. On how much we liked his new record. On how we would sing "Rock Me on the Water" to our baby children. When it came my turn to speak, the last of the group, I said - if my memory serves me accurately - this:

Tsgrtplsrtmt. Vgrwnplstnngtrmsc. Thfrstrcrdvrstlwsstrtrbfrsng.
Lvrsgsbcbsthrwrtnnvclrngnwhchcnsng.
Ncwnthrsbckrdngnrslvrkndclndtgttthsngtfmhd.
Thnlsgncnplllthwthrghnthpnsrs. Whsbnnrttlwssmntthdnc?
Dvrsngcndncncrt?

Which, in English, means this:

It's a great pleasure to meet you. I've grown up listening to your music. The first record I ever stole was *Saturate Before Using*. I love your songs because they're written in a vocal range in which I can sing. Once, I went horseback riding near Silver Lake and couldn't get that song of yours out of my head. The only song I can play all the way through on the piano is "Rosie." Why is Bonnie Raitt always so mean to her audience? Do you ever sing "Candy" in concert?

So much to say, and only five seconds in which to say it! Whatever it was that I really said, it was all smashed together and said quicker than lightning, with all of the vowels dropped. And, unlike lightning, my voice trailed off weakly at the end without the thunderous bang. I was completely starstruck, like a three-year-old meeting Barney. Inside my adrenalized body, I was dancing a joyous frug, but you

never would have known it on the outside, as I fell completely apart.

The last time I saw Jackson Browne, he looked right at me, started to say Thank You, but, probably realizing that he didn't know what he'd be thanking me for, said nothing and boarded the bus.

This time, after the show, we walked right past the tour bus on the way to the car, and did not stop until we got there.

