

Celebs come out to see Jay-Z

BY ADRIAN RUHI

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How often do superstars Diddy, Beyonce Knowles and Alex Rodriguez rub shoulders with fans on the other side of the big stage? At the Bank-Atlantic Center Saturday night, the three watched from the floor, surrounded by a crowd that Jay-Z kept on its feet for almost two hours.

The Sunrise venue, renamed the Jay-Z Center for the first night of the rapper's nationwide BP3 Tour, pulsated with every bass line and guitar lick emitted from his 10-piece band, the Roc Boys.

The 40-year-old Brooklyn-bred mogul, born Shawn Carter, rose from under the stage to the brooding piano chords and rolling drum snares of *Run This Town*.

Per the song's lyrics, Jay-Z and his band wore "all black everything." A New York Yankees fitted cap and Wayfarer sunglasses concealed the face of the rapper, who has tried to keep his personal life — including his marriage to Knowles — as low-key as possible.

The show's staging was anything but subtle, though. The Grammy winner's backdrop was a giant screen shaped as New York City's skyline, with visuals reflecting the songs' music videos and



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Onstage, Jay-Z commanded the band, the microphone and the audience.

The first half of the set was the strongest: He barreled through a mix of hits, assisted by long-time protégé and sidekick Memphis Bleek for the early half as well as up-and-coming singer Bridget Kelley, who provided vocals on *Empire State of Mind*, the ode to New York City that was Jay-Z's

first No. 1 single.

The *BP3 Tour* wasn't without its flaws: Toward the end of the first half, Jay-Z began losing his voice. The three-piece horn section, crucial to songs like *Show Me What You Got* and *D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune)*, was muted.

The problems only continued as Atlanta-based rapper Young Jeezy emerged for *Real As It Gets*. Billed as a special guest of the tour, Jeezy

should have been an opening act instead of a half-time sideshow for the vastly talented Jay-Z. Whereas Jay-Z clearly enunciated every word of every song, Jeezy rarely finished a line.

At 30 minutes, Jeezy's set was bloated and hampered the rhythm of the show (although it did give Jay an opportunity to rest his voice). It took Jay re-emerging for *My President* to get the crowd back into pace.

Dirt Off Your Shoulder was preceded by a comical video clip of President Barack Obama quoting the song during a speech. As if to imply his dominance in hip-hop, Jay-Z instructed his DJ and studio engineer Young Guru to play more of his hits, which led to a medley of a dozen more songs that he could have performed in his main set.

Between the crowd sing-along of *Big Pimpin'* and the show-ending *Encore*, Jay-Z acknowledged the audience.

"I'm not jaded. I appreciate every one of you being here," he said as he removed his hat and sunglasses to reveal his face for the first time.

The opening act, Virginia R&B singer Trey Songz and his five-piece band, delivered a 35-minute set of hypersexual slow jams like *I Invented Sex* and *Say Aah*.