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Forty years after they first formed, **Level 42** are still going strong. And judging from the high level of enthusiasm that this well-received Bank Holiday Monday afternoon concert generated at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival, they still can boast a devoted legion of fanatical followers. Though the news of former member Boon Gould's death six days earlier must have cast a dark shadow over the group, especially for surviving co-founders Mark King and Mike Lindup, they produced an upbeat 75-minute set whose only moment of solemnity was provided by the presence of the band's classic haunting ballad, 'Leaving Me Now,' which King dedicated to Gould's memory.

"He was a brother, a friend, an

amazing musician, and a fantastic lyricist,"

said the singer/bassist with palpable emotion in his voice while Mike Lindup's lone piano at the end of the song, with its glistening melodic filigrees, was poignantly evocative.

Elsewhere, the music was less reflective, dominated by King's omnipresent slapped bass, which propelled the group through a catalogue of big UK hits that brought the 1980s vividly back to life: from the chugging jazz-funk of 'The Sun Goes Down (Living It Up)' and the turbo-charged 'Hot Water' to the anthemic 'Something About You' and 'Lessons In Love.' Bolstered by a punchy three-piece horn section, this was Level 42 on steroids, injecting a new dynamism into their old tunes without jettisoning the spirit of the originals. For many of the audience, the gig represented an enjoyable nostalgic trip back to the '80s but also, more importantly, it proved that Level 42 are still a potent force on the concert stage while also reaffirming Mark King's place in the pantheon of all-time great bass players.

(Charles Waring)