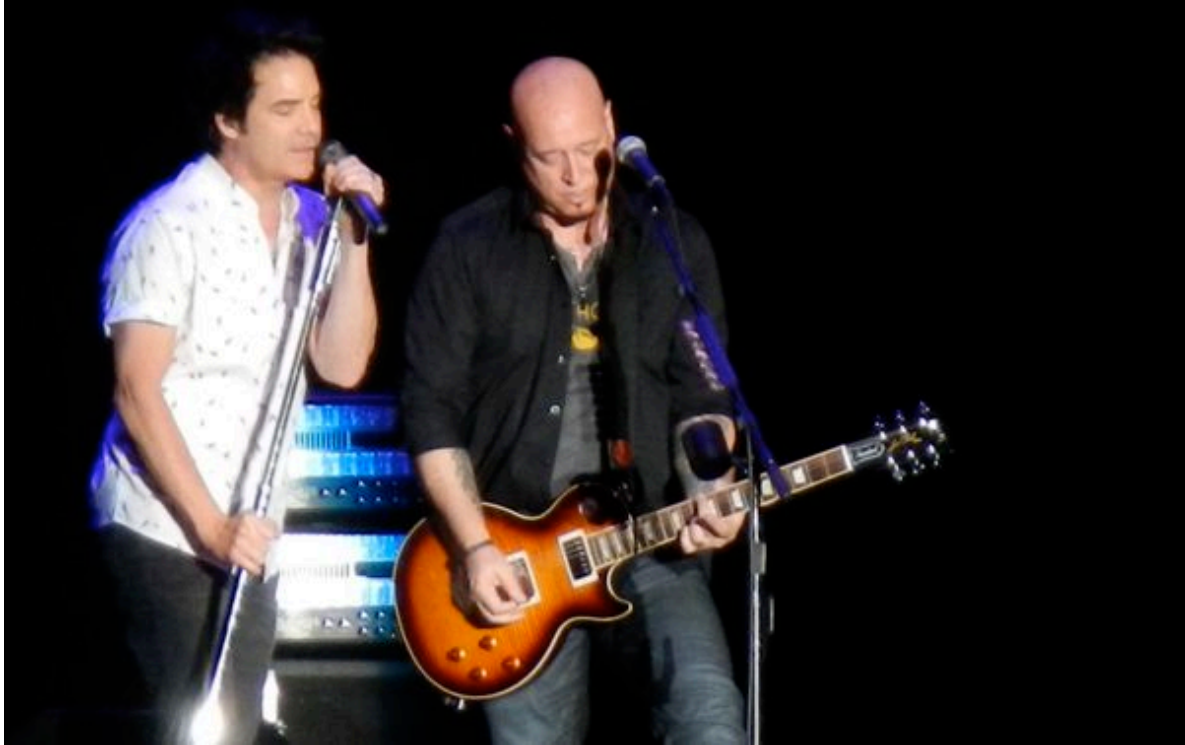


# Train nails it with old and new tracks



Pat Monahan and Jimmy Stafford founded the San Francisco band Train. Photos/Kathryn Reed

**By Susan Wood**

STATELINE – It didn't take long to realize Americana rock band Train would transport its audience through time during Friday night's outdoor summer concert series at Harveys.

After a notable, guitar-driven opening act by Striking Matches – which with one album out already has songs featured on the show "Nashville," a train whistle launched the 20-year-old San Francisco-based band onto the stage.

People immediately rose to their feet with the opening number and 2003 mega hit "Calling All Angels."

The enthusiastic crowd sang "I won't give up if you don't give up" with such zeal, it may have been heard at the top of

Heavenly Mountain Resort.

The high-energy show July 25 never let up or down.

The song “Save Me San Francisco” kept people on their feet.

The 2009 hit was written after what lead guitarist Jimmy Stafford described to *Lake Tahoe News* as a three-year slowing down for the band, which he and lead singer Pat Monahan founded in San Francisco. Their tenure together has produced eight albums.



Jimmy Stafford brings the crowd to its feet with his guitar riffs.

“We felt like we wanted to get back to our Bay Area roots because we didn’t know if anybody cared about us any more,” Stafford said.

The move paid off. It became their second career top hit, and the doubt about the band’s popularity disappeared.

With “Get to Me,” and its lyrics of whether to “parasail or first class mail,” Monahan threw his head back in complete abandon with a perfect segue to the band’s second Billboard top 20 hit “Meet Virginia.” Monahan sang it like a slam poet.

Stafford, with his heavily tattooed arms, commanded the stage at one point for a noteworthy guitar solo.

Train has proven to stand the test of time and lived up to its think-outside-the-box, diverse reputation. Beyond the rock-pop sound, the band also gave the audience a taste of a little Latin with its popular number “50 Ways to Say Goodbye.”

During that rhythm-induced tune, Monahan said Stafford asked to say goodbye to several Train T-shirts. In throwing them out, Monahan even hinted to having “an arm like Tim Lincecum” – referencing the Cy Young award-winning San Francisco Giants pitcher.

With its known ability to write songs of a different genre and play a variety of instruments ranging from ukulele for Stafford and saxophone for Monahan, the band has never seemed confined to being pigeon-holed in one music category. Band members seem to thrive on the unexpected – even while the fans expect a sound they follow and revere.

“We pride ourselves on that,” Stafford told *LTN*.

In the early days, Train played in small venues at Lake Tahoe while staying at the late singer Donna Summer’s house and enjoying Bloody Mary’s at Rosie’s in Tahoe City, according to the 50-year-old Illinois musician. And, the band hasn’t given up experimenting with varying arena sizes or trying out different genres.

Along the lines of his garage-band roots, Monahan even provided a sampling of the legendary rock band Led Zeppelin with his distinct interpretation of lead Robert Plant’s bellowing voice. Later he channeled no less than Bob Marley for a taste of Reggae. And for one of the encores, the band belted out “Dream On” of Aerosmith, which is coming to town next month.

But for the most part, it was all about Train and its songs.



Several women are invited on stage to sing and take selfies with Pat Monahan.

Many from the excited multi-generational crowd at Harveys danced, swayed, fist-pumped, screamed and mouthed most of the lyrics to their numerous hit songs. And, the Grammy award-winning band was more than accommodating to get the audience into it – even in pictures, as Monahan admitted to going “crazy a little bit” at taking selfies with cameras from the front.

If that wasn’t enough for being up close and personal, Monahan brought more than 30 women on stage to dance and sing the “Mermaid” song from the 2012 album “California 37” – named for the Bay Area highway.

“I’ve never been so scared in my life. You girls were hunting me down like I was the last garment at the mall,” Monahan joked later.

Major fans Laura Edgar, 48, of Mill Valley and her two daughters Erin, 12, and Chelsea, 14, described a freeing experience when they blast the band’s music while they’re riding on Highway 37. The trio painted their fingernails with mermaids for the occasion and didn’t miss a beat when it came

to celebrating the show, which offered a trip down memory lane.

“It’s happy music we can sing to in the car,” the mother said, adding: “It’s clean – they’re genuine and authentic.”

Edgar likes that Monahan sings about his life and means what he sings. Evidence of that was proven with his heart-filled “When I Look to the Sky,” one of Monahan’s self-proclaimed favorite songs that serves as a dedication to “anybody who has ever lost anyone.” (The line: “something tells me you’re here with me” reduced this writer to tears.)

After all, Train’s biggest hit “Drops of Jupiter” was written as an emotional tribute to Monahan having lost his mother to cancer, according to Stafford.

“(Monahan) woke up from a dream and felt strongly she had come to him. He had a vision of her floating in space,” Stafford said.

The band has just sold its 1 millionth bottle on its wine label that supports “Family House,” a Bay Area nonprofit to benefit children with cancer.

Train further showed its heart with a rather poignant version of “Marry Me.” Stafford, who closed his eyes playing most of the song, earlier told Lake Tahoe News that some in the audience through the years have either proposed or gotten married on stage to the 2010 hit tune. (Drummer Drew Shoals is an ordained minister.)

The band’s musical ability has always transcended, as shown with Monahan helping Shoals on the drums during one of their earliest recordings “Free.” And the members show no sign of slowing down. They served up their latest “Angel in Blue Jeans” off their soon-to-be-released album. The song has a hint of the new band Of Monsters and Men with their “Little Talks.”

The audience was certainly receptive to Train's latest tune, which resembled music one could ride a horse to.

But then again, it was the signature older numbers that got the biggest response. The screams were loud and long near the end of the show during "Hey Soul Sister" off the 2009 "Save Me San Francisco" album. And Monahan appeared to work so hard on stage to entertain, he seemed out of breath. But then he picked up the pace further with the bouncy hit "Drive By."

When the band left the stage, one man could be heard saying: "Drops of Jupiter." Train didn't disappoint when it served up its biggest hit for the encore.

"These are the songs that still put smiles on people's faces, and that's why we do them," Stafford, who admitted to living his dream as a child, said in the interview.

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### **Notes:**

Harvey's Summer Outdoor Concert Series continues with:

- July 30 Journey, Steve Miller Band
- Aug. 2 Lady Gaga
- Aug. 3 Boston, Doobie Brothers
- Aug. 8 Aerosmith, Slash
- Aug. 14 Bruno Mars
- Aug. 16 Sammy Hagar and Friends
- Aug. 24 Rascal Flatts, Sheryl Crow
- Aug. 29-30 Eagles.