

# Zac Brown puts plenty of rock in his country



Zac Brown delivers a high-energy concert July 20 at Harveys. Photos/Kathryn Reed

**By Susan Wood**

STATELINE – Despite a raucous storm that produced a widespread power outage affecting thousands of South Shore customers, the Zac Brown band electrified an enthusiastic audience who stood on their feet for most of the show at Harveys.

The drizzle that ended Sunday's dramatic summer storm did little to dampen the spirits of the Southern rock, country band or the audience at the casino's outdoor summer concert series. This is even with a late start that sent lines of people rushing to the food and drink concessionaires. (No French fries, though, with the cutter being electric, and only cash-only payments were accepted given no power.)

But the important thing – the show went on and turned out to be a huge hit.

Right after roadies took the tarps off the stage equipment, guitarist and vocalist Clay Cook entertained with a few acoustical numbers, including those performed by artists ranging from Ray Charles to John Mayer. The improvisation provided a key opening to the eight-member band waiting to be powered up.

Then, the power of the three-time Grammy award-winning band showed its appeal and its range, knocking out hits and popular numbers from their five albums and other artists' covers as well. Zac Brown, himself as lead, came out with a top hat on and asked is the audience: "Staying warm?"

Even if the air had cooled off considerably, the concert turned hot quickly.

Between the screams, fist pumps and dancing, the concertgoers rewarded the band with love. After all, not all country bands can go from singing a sentimental "falling in love" in the ACA-nominated "As She's Walking Away" to Cook's own rendition of Robert Plant from the legendary rock band Led Zeppelin.

From there, the band led by Brown on vocals and guitar and violinist Jimmy De Martini accompanying turned up its country prowess and heavy string influence with a perfect imitation of Charlie Daniels' "The Devil Went Down to Georgia." This was fitting, given Brown's roots come from Georgia, and he references the state in their huge hit "Toes."



People were on their feet for most of the entire sold-out show.

Still, Brown acknowledged his appreciation for Lake Tahoe and mentioned expecting to see a “wampus cat” in these rugged mountains. The cat is a type of cougar descending from Cherokee mythology.

“It’s a beautiful place,” he said, as drummer Daniel de Los Reyes flashed a peace sign. Reyes had just won a Percussionist of the Year 2014 Drummies award.

The sound quality appeared to reverberate through the mountains, and it especially proved pertinent when Brown slowed things down with poignant lyrics featured in “Sweet Annie” – “But one day lightning will strike, and my bark will lose its bite, but don’t give up on me.”

It was as though the audience was made up a giant Zac Brown fan club, mouthing the words to most of the songs.

“Their music is different than most modern music, with a lot of sex. They just like to have a good time,” Bella Wulfsberg of Rohnert Park said. The recent South Tahoe High School graduate, who had an urban picnic near Cecil’s Market before embarking on the concert, characterized one of her favorite bands as the guys next door who look after you.

These guys next door brought a rare combination of perfect

harmony in the vocals and synchronicity of their instruments as demonstrated in their stirring, back-to-back singles: "Free," "No Hurry," "Goodbye in Her Eyes" and "Knee Deep."

Sandwiched between sets, the band launched into a melancholy version of Van Morrison's "Into the Mystic." You could almost hear the "fog horn blow" to a tune that would "rock your gypsy soul."

During their own soulful ballad "Colder Weather," Brown got up and close and personal at stage level to take pictures of the audience with a cell phone. The melancholy sweetness of the song oozed from the stage. He tapped his heart as if touched by the reception and the song's effect on the audience.

From there, he gave out a heartfelt thank you to the concertgoers for attending, as some of the proceeds go to the band's charity Camp Southern Ground. It has raised more than \$2 million in the last few years to help special needs children. Brown was inspired since he spent summers as a camp counselor.

In a special tribute, members of the Armed Forces came out in uniform and saluted on stage during one of three encores the band performed.

The skeleton suits provided an interesting backdrop to a country band led by bassist and singer John Driskell Hopkins pulling off the hit Metallica song "Enter Sandman." The heavy metal band plays it in honor of former star New York Yankees closing pitcher Mariano Rivera.

Then in a complete melodic turnaround, the band got light and breezy with their biggest hit: "Chicken Fried." Brown didn't even need to sing. He put the microphone out and the audience eagerly belted out these laid-back lyrics and melody that are in large part what sent the group soaring on the charts.

**Notes:**

Harveys will continue its lineup of concert performances with:

- Train, July 25
- Journey and Steve Miller, July 30
- Lady Gaga, Aug. 2
- Boston and the Doobie Brothers, Aug. 3
- Aerosmith, Aug. 8
- Bruno Mars, Aug. 14
- Sammy Hagar and Friends, Aug. 16
- Rascal Flatts and Sheryl Crow, Aug. 24.