

Fans embrace Chesney's brand of country



Kenny Chesney had people on their feet all night July 22. Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – Country music great Kenny Chesney rocked a packed house of American kids, their parents and other beach-loving party music enthusiasts Wednesday night at Harveys casino for its outdoor summer concert series.

Along the way, Chesney enlisted some high-profile help on stage. He was joined by red rocker Sammy Hagar and singer Uncle Kracker near the end of the show, keeping an engaged audience on their feet and screaming.

Chesney, who has also played the Lake Tahoe arena in 2009 and

acts like he has fun doing so, provided quite a show with signature hits from his 15 albums. The Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year for four years transported concert-goers to a beach scene with videos of pearly white sand, tanned bodies and libations like Corona, the Big Revival Tour sponsor, along with other concoctions. While the Americana band Train that played the night before has its own wine and Hagar touts his signature tequila, Chesney promotes his own rum – Blue Chair Bay.

Opening with the song "Reality," the veteran country artist took most in attendance away from that. He played and sang hit after hit after hit as the beach balls flew in the audience and the bras flew on stage. The singer-guitarist added three to his collection on display attached to a pole in front of drummer Sean Paddock.

"Impressive," Chesney quipped at the size of one of them.



Kenney Chesney creates a party atmosphere at Harveys. Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

Chesney, who spent most of the concert smiling and complimenting the Tahoe crowd, was there to impress the "No

Shoes Nation," a following that has made the term beach bum upscale and fashionable.

"I like the nature of his songs. It's island music, so it's laid back with no shoes," said Steve Mussell of Sparks, who wore a Chesney concert shirt from the 2009 tour in which he saw the artist at Harveys.

Mussell wasn't alone in his sentiment.

During his second number, "Beer in Mexico," someone up front thrust a sign high that read " $\frac{1}{2}$ Wild Child, $\frac{1}{2}$ American Kid," named after two Chesney songs.

Chesney often acknowledged the crowd's enthusiasm.

"We are so happy and thrilled to see your faces," he bellowed. "We're here for one simple reason – because you guys are here."

Upon wrapping up "Til It's Gone," a woman yelled: "How about that?"

Then, he launched into yet another hit "Summertime," while occasionally pushing out his tongue from those pearly white teeth.

Most in the audience joined him in song.



Sammy Hagar and Kenny Chesney turn the show into pure rock for a few songs.
Photo/Taylor Flynn/Tahoe Mountain News

“You sound amazing,” he said. Then, he slowed the hard-driving rock performance a tad for his sultry, sexy mega hit “Somewhere With You.”

With one bra flying on stage at that time, Chesney laughed and admitted to forgetting the lyrics.

It all soon returned though as Chesney cranked out the nostalgic “I Go Back” off his first album. The lights came up and everybody sang. The band got the love and fed off of it.

He labeled his next song, the blockbuster tune, “You and Tequila,” as one of his favorites and geared it for those who feel addicted to someone.

Chesney and his six-member band – Clayton Mitchell, Kenny Greenberg and John Conley on guitars, Paddock, Wyatt Beard on keyboards and bassist Harmoni Kelley, who took the lead on “Whole Lotta Rosie.” This is not your grandmother’s country. The rock song rivaled anything Robert Plant pumped out with Led Zeppelin.

And all this was even before Hagar joined the stage. Right before, concert-goers got in the mood dancing through the jumpy new hit "American Kids."

"Any night that I can make music with this guy is a good night," Chesney said. And on came Hagar to the stage with drinks for the duo.

"You'll like these. I call them Sammy's red, white and blue," he said, further admitting to having four or five to make sure "they were all right." He was so relaxed, Hagar kicked off his shoes on stage.

From there, Hagar had the audience roaring with old rock hits "I'll Fall in Love Again," "Finish What Ya Started," from Van Halen fame and his hard-driving "I Can't Drive 55." The latter represented a perfect song for Tahoe's summer tourism traffic on U.S. Highway 50 from Nevada to the Y. He even changed the lyrics to be more Tahoe specific.

When Chesney and Hagar weren't singing and drinking, they hugged, showing their closeness.

Chesney even told the audience how he rode a horse on the beach to Hagar's beach house in Cabo San Lucas. The woman with Chesney told him: "That man has Sammy Hagar hair," Chesney recalled.

"He thought I was some tourist," Chesney said, laughing.

The male bonding didn't end there.

"You never know who's going to share the stage," Chesney yelled out.

Then, singer Uncle Kracker came to the stage for duets of "Follow Me" and "Drift Away." The crowd almost drowned out the singers.

It was one big party.

"We're not done yet," Chesney said before bringing on more romance with "How Forever Feels."

His encore brought out opening act Chase Rice to the stage for "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy."

Chesney changed the lyrics to his top song: "she thinks Chase is sexy."

Rice put on an entertaining opening act. He has a history of entertaining being a University of North Carolina linebacker and having a stint on the "Survivor" show.

But it was his boyish charm that got the attention of a woman up front named Michelle. He brought her on stage and created a song just for her. She was wearing a "I'm gonna ride" T-shirt, so Rice tailored the lyrics to accommodate the display on her chest. Lots of flirting was going on.

"Look, empty hand," he yelled to the crowd, while holding up her left arm.

Then, Rice – a lyricist initially – involved the whole crowd with the song he wrote: "Cruise" recorded by Florida Georgia Line. Music to the ears, the entire arena filled with singers – the ultimate compliment.

The Harveys Summer Outdoor Concert Series continues with rock singer Jackson Browne on Aug. 7, legendary superstar Elton John the next night, Dierks Bentley on Aug. 23, Sammy Hagar on Sept. 5 and Dave Matthews on Sept. 9.