

Michael Franti keeps crowd on its toes



Michael Franti thrives on interacting with his devoted fans. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – Seeing Michael Franti perform is a workout for the body and the brain.

The singer-musician, who can cross genres as wide-ranging as reggae and soul to rap and alternative, provided a personable, press-the-flesh concert for hundreds at MontBleu's showroom Aug. 19.

What the crowd received was a feast for the senses – hearing, sight and touch.

Franti with his five-piece band is known for getting up close and personal with his fans – especially through his signature messages of social consciousness.

This show was no different in delivering his messages of hope – all at the same time keeping the crowd on its feet, swaying, jumping and dancing for a few hours. A few people held up neon signs of “love” on cardboard.

His latest hit “Good to Be Alive Today,” which he performed, tells the story of an ideal world without violence, strife and racism. It went viral on social media before its formal release.

“Some people trying to get high. Some people losing their minds. Some people trying to get by. And when you look in my eyes, you see the sign of the times. We are looking for the same things. What if this song was No. 1? Would it mean that love had won? Would it mean that the world was saved, and no guns were drawn today?” – “Good to Be Alive Today”.

As he played a collection of songs for his Soul Rocker tour, Franti weaved his way through the audience on several occasions. Many reached out to touch him like he was a social justice prophet.

“It’s good to have him in the world,” John Eby of Nevada City said, summing up his love of the spiritual artist. He was surrounded by dancing women on the second level.



Michael Franti captivates an appreciative audience at MontBleu. Photo/Kathryn Reed

About a third of the time, Franti set up a mini stage near the back and brought several people on stage to dance and sing with him. In front, the guitarist even brought up his son, Cappy, to join the band and often turned the lights up to show off the audience.

“Hello, Tahoe. Anybody get any lake time, any beach time today?” he bellowed.

Franti, who was adopted by a Finnish-American couple, often engaged his fans with banter, chatting up his life and background. He was born in Oakland, grew up in Davis and lives in San Francisco – of which he invited all the fans to join him there.

The no-holds-barred show kept moving, albeit a bit repetitive at times, with Franti favorites such as his well-known opening number – “Hey, hey, hey,” off the “Sound of Sunshine” album, a tune he also performed along with his last song – the cult favorite “Say Hey.” (Franti even produced a San Francisco Giants version in 2010.)

Off his latest album, he graced the stage and beyond with “We Are Earthlings” and “My Favorite Wine is Tequila.” To that, many raised their glasses. He tipped his hat to musicians we’ve recently lost such as David Bowie, Glenn Frey and Prince – to which he launched a tribute performing “Purple Rain.”

Much of Franti’s music serves to overcome obstacles with positive reinforcements such as his tunes – “I Got Love For You,” which he performed along with the long version of “I’m Alive.” The latter had the crowd bouncing as if at the gym during aerobics.

He even got the audience square dancing with “Life is Better With You” – the culmination of a story in which he had to dance in front of the class in grade school and later redeemed himself in a bar later in life.

Franti began his music career in 1986 as part of the industrial punk band The Beatnigs. Eight years later, he formed his mainstay band “Spearhead.”

Alternative artist, Zella Day, in her rough Alanis Morissette style, opened for Franti.