

# To Tahoe Eric Church is Mr. 'Understood'



Eric Church delivers high-energy country to fans on Sept. 2 at Harveys. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Susan Wood**

STATELINE – It was like a revival the minute southern country artist Eric Church hit the stage for the faithful who showed up and stood up in great numbers Saturday night for the last artist at the outdoor summer concert at Harveys this year.

Church, a singer and guitarist who represents a cross between southern rock and outlaw country, played the entertainer to the cowboy-hat-clad crowd. Many fans were enthralled, mouthing the words to most of the songs they all recognize from his high-energy, seven-piece band.

Among the fans were Amanda Horsman and Byron August, the latter who came in a Led Zeppelin shirt. They came up from the Sacramento area for the concert, which started later than usual by a half hour.

"We've seen a lot of people, but he really cares about his fans," August said. He explained that he heard Church bought a record press so he could deliver the music to his fans before it was released to radio stations.

Church does nothing to shy away from the unconventional. His latest album released two years ago, "Mr. Misunderstood," arrived in the mailboxes of his church choir members.

August understands that purist dedication to country music. He owns a record player.

Mitzi Olsen of Gardnerville, who danced most of the evening, also noted that she admires Church because he is "super country."

"So many people play country songs. I feel like he's still just country. He's stayed true to his roots," she said. Olsen first heard Church while she was vacationing in Utah and has remained loyal to the North Carolina artist who played Jimmy Buffet cover songs with a band while in high school.

He's come a long way since then.

With his signature aviator glasses that protect his contact lenses from the heat of the lights, Church, 40, burst on the scene about a decade ago. He styled an image from his blue-collar demeanor and no-surrender type of passion that proves nothing comes easy – even to nice guys.

His southern outlaw country rock genre ran the gamut at the concert. The outlaw appeal of an award-winning artist with five albums under his belt came out with 2009's "Smoke a Little Smoke," written with his known cannabis advocacy in

mind; and his No. 1 single from 2012, “Drink in My Hand” – which joins the mega hit “Springsteen” on his widely popular 2011 album “Chief.” “Cold One” from the 2014 “Outsiders” album also got the crowd jumping, yelling and raising their drinks.

“Doing OK?” he asked, holding up his own beverage. The crowd roared.

With a few fist pumps and lunges to the edge of the stage, Church often smiled and looked tickled by how engaged his audience was.



Fans show their love for Eric Church.  
Photo/Kathryn Reed

During “These Boots” from his 2006 “Sinners Like Me” album, some in the crowd threw their cowboy boots up on the stage. Church implied they’ve “saved his ass” a few times, even while holding up a red kiddie boot that appears too young to worry about such things.

Beyond the raucous image, Church demonstrated how quickly he can rotate from hard-driving electric guitar to acoustic with sentimental tunes that touch at heart strings.

His huge hit “Give Me Back My Hometown” shows his appreciation

of his geographic roots complete with a "Pizza Hut," and the crowd reciprocated. As many do, the first-timer to the area also mentioned how lucky Tahoe residents have it with the region's stunning beauty.

And with love you baby "Like a Wrecking Ball," he gave the audience a glimpse of what it's like to come home from his on-the-road excursions.

A few women even made a banner to acknowledge their fan club-like appreciation of reckless love by recklessly trying to gain access to the stage. Security stopped them temporarily, but Church ended up signing the banner later in the show.

More of the sentimental that had the crowd swooning and swaying, Church launched into his new smash hit "Record Year" – with the crowd immediately recognizing it. At first, the song from "Mr. Misunderstood" is just that. But it's really about how he dealt with the loss of a love.

At times, the country artist marveled by his fans' enthusiasm.

"You know, I've played this song countless times, but I'm not sure if anything is better than this right here," he said, stopping to admire the crowd. He stood there with two American flags handed to him, draped around his neck as he played his mega hit "Springsteen" about a love affair.

Upon ripping into "Holdin' My Own," Church touched his heart to say goodbye on his last song running long past 10pm. But he returned for an encore of "Like Jesus Does" – an acoustic number about lasting love.

"This is the greatest thing music does. It freezes this moment in time. We haven't played for a while, so this moment is frozen for me. The way you stepped in to sing. I want to say you're the greatest," he told the crowd with a bow.

Church plays again Sunday evening to wrap up the Harveys

Outdoor Summer Concert Series.