

(4.28.17) <http://www.toledoblade.com/Music-Theater-Dance/2017/04/28/Jason-Aldean-provides-something-for-everyone-in-Toledo-show.html>

Aldean provides something for everyone in Toledo show

Review: Country star opens tour with rocking night at Huntington Center



Jason Aldean performs at the Huntington Center in Toledo Thursday.

BLADE/ANDY MORRISON

Eighteen songs into his show Thursday night at the Huntington Center, Jason Aldean filled the crowd in on his philosophy about putting on a concert.

“I’m not a guy who likes to do a lot of talking. I came here to play some music, and we’re going to play as much music as we can.”

And by the time he finished, no one in attendance could say that Aldean is not a man of his word. He and his two openers, Kane Brown and Chris Young, rolled out 44 songs and nearly four hours of music by the time the stage finally went dark at 11:15.

It had been nearly six months since Aldean had been on the road, and two weeks before his tour-opening performance Thursday night in Toledo, he admitted to The Blade that he was getting antsy. Fresh off being named entertainer of the year by the Academy of Country Music, he said he planned to take the Toledo crowd on a bit of a rollercoaster ride, and he didn’t disappoint.

After a shadowy figure dropped from the ceiling to the stage behind a curtain (was it really Aldean or just an illusion?), Aldean stepped on stage to “They Don’t Know,” his upcoming single, the title of his new album, and also the name of the tour. It was an interesting choice for a concert opening because several people in the crowd were murmuring they didn’t know what the song was.

But from then on it was nothing but hits, and Aldean has a lot of them to lean on. With his last single “Any Ol’ Barstool” hitting No. 1, the Georgia native now has 18 chart-toppers, plenty of material to create that range of emotions he strives for in his shows. There were fist-pumping jams like “The Only Way I Know,” “Gonna Know We Were Here,” and “Take a Little Ride.” Then Aldean brought it down a little with “A Little More Summertime,” “Any Ol’ Barstool,” then right back up again with “When She Says Baby” and “Crazy Town.”

It was a tremendously paced show and for the first night of a tour, there were no noticeable hiccups. The crowd got a little bit of everything, including an introduction to Brown, a 23-year-old up-and-comer from Georgia who got the singing bug by winning his 11th grade talent competition, in which he sang Young’s “Gettin’ You Home (The Black Dress Song).

Brown later became a social media star, and still has millions of followers on Facebook. He got noticed by RCA Nashville through his online popularity. He posted several videos for cover songs, including him performing George Strait’s “Check Yes or No.” That video was viewed more than 7 million times. Thursday night, Toledo got to hear seven of his songs, including the popular “Used to Love You Sober.”

Young had more than a few female admirers in the crowd, and he did what he does best - sing. Young too was discovered in an unorthodox way. He was the winner of the 2006 “Nashville Star” singing competition on the USA Network. The man can absolutely sing, and he showed off his array of ballads in a 14-song set, including his sexy “Gettin’ You Home” and “Who I Am with You.” His ballad-driven style is a stark contrast to the hard-charging Aldean. But the pair are good friends and have previously teamed up on tour, and there were no women complaining Thursday night that Young, Country Weekly’s previous “Country music’s hottest bachelor,” is along this summer.

But there was little doubt who the star of the show was in Toledo. As Aldean said, he didn’t do much talking, but he knows how to entertain, and it was obvious that he had a lot of pent-up energy from six months of barbecues and relaxing at his ranch near Nashville. He stomped around the stage, slapping as many hands as he could reach, and often racing from one microphone to another.

There was no telling that the Broken Bow Records headliner and former delivery truck driver just turned 40 on Feb. 28. He joked recently that he needs to watch what he eats a little more, and he aches sometimes when he gets out of bed, but he still feels like he has the energy level of a younger man.

At one point, it looked as though Aldean may have hit a wall and burned all the energy in his tank, but he caught a second wind with “Hicktown.” It’s hard to believe that “Hicktown” was his first single 12 years ago and that it only reached No. 10 on the charts. It is still one of his most popular songs, and Thursday night the crowd roared and sang along as the guitars screamed and fire blasted from the corner of the stage.

That song flowed naturally into Aldean’s tribute to country rock, “Lights Come On,” then into his rap/country favorite “Dirt Road Anthem.” Aldean freely admits that he isn’t the best singer in the business, but he has a wide range of vocal skills that are perfect in a concert setting: he’s a rocker, rapper, balladeer, even a traditional country artist who spotlights a steel guitarist in his band.

There was a little something for everyone Thursday night at the Huntington Center, and that’s really all you can ask.