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THE TENNESSEAN

Jason Aldean brings guests, decade of hits to Nashville show



Ten years ago **Jason Aldean** was lucky if he could sell 50 tickets to one of his shows. Last summer he filled ballparks across the country, and Saturday night he played to a sold-out crowd at Bridgestone Arena.

"I look out at this and it's incredible," Aldean told the thousands of people that bought tickets and braved the icy weather to hear him sing. "You all have let us do it our way."

Aldean, who will celebrate his 10th anniversary touring with his band in 2015, filled two hours with hit songs ranging from his first triumph "Hicktown" to his recent 14-week No. 1 "Burnin' It Down." The show was Aldean's first full concert in the Nashville area since early 2012 and his confidence and showmanship have grown to match his fame.

The singer kicked off his set on the Nashville date of his Burn It Down tour with his first hit "Hicktown" and then moved into one of his biggest "My Kinda Party" as fireworks crisscrossed his expansive stage.

"I know the weather (stinks) and we appreciate you all being here," Aldean said. "One thing I can tell you guys is that tomorrow is Sunday and you don't have to be at work. If there ain't some drunk people when y'all leave here, I'm gonna be (upset.)"

Aldean's stage set towered behind him with six rows of dancing, twirling, running and blinking lights that stretched toward the arena's cavernous ceiling. Two diamond-shaped viewing screens hung overhead and showed pre-recorded footage during songs as well as Aldean's performance. He punctuated songs with pyrotechnics, and the country singer made it a point to work every angle of his stage. He performed to audiences on the far right and left corners as well as fans standing around a center catwalk that led to a smaller stage deeper into the audience.

Aldean sang far more than he talked, telling fans the he knew they bought tickets to hear music and not idle chitchat. His set list was a musical tour of his last 10 years in the music business — and reflected his childhood. The Georgia native has long been vocal about his affinity for beloved country group **Alabama**. Saturday night he told the audience that Alabama's singer **Randy Owen** had traveled from Fort Payne, Ala., to sing with him. Owen was welcomed with thunderous applause and the men sang "Tennessee River" and "My Home's in Alabama," which Aldean said was one of the first songs he learned to play on guitar.

Aldean also tended to his own hits. "Big Green Tractor," which helped catapult the singer's career into country superstar status in 2009, came early in his set as did "Tattoos on this Town," a drum-thumping version of "Johnny Cash," and "The Truth," a heart-break ballad that had much of the crowd slow-dancing in the aisles. He picked up the pace with 2014's most played country song "When She Says Baby" and went a little retro with "1994." He dueted on his multi-week No. 1 "Don't You Wanna Stay" with video footage of **Kelly Clarkson** then brought out opening acts **Tyler Farr** and **Cole Swindell** to sing "The Only Way I Know."

He closed his set with "Crazy Town" and then reemerged for the encore with lively versions of "Dirt Road Anthem" and "She's Country" that ended with a curtain of sparks.

Aldean has said he has much to look forward to in 2015. He's getting married in the coming months and maybe members of the music industry will see fit to mark his 10th anniversary in the business with an entertainer of the year win. It's time and well deserved.