

2,000 Eagles fans flock to Town Park to enjoy Hotel California's stellar tribute performance



Over 2,000 fans surrounded Town Park's Bandshell on Wednesday night to enjoy a tribute performance to the Eagles by Hotel California.

The congenial quartet performed over 150 Eagles tribute concerts in the USA and Canada in 2023 and last Wednesday's performance delighted locals.

Last week's "Concert in the Park", presented by TD and the Town of Aurora, attracted an energetic, multigenerational crowd which spanned Town Park from Wells Street to The Armory's patio.

It was a perfect July evening for music under the stars and a respite for the versatile veterans of Hotel California who performed in the rain and mist the previous Wednesday night at Town Park during Grand Evolution's entertaining tribute to Styx and Journey.

Jay Riehl, Hotel California's regular drummer, showed off his versatility by playing bass and covering a different set of lead vocals.

Instead of delivering Don Henley vocals as he does when drumming for the tribute band, the personable Riehl rolled out Joe Walsh's edgy, raspy vocals in "Rocky Mountain Way" and "Life's Been Good" to celebrate these solo classics by the hardest-living Eagle.

The combination of Walsh tunes brought Set One to a triumphant close in Town Park with 2,000 fans clapping in unison for more from Riehl and his bandmates. Riehl also delivered the vocals for "Heartache Tonight" in the band's climactic song in the second set.

Playing various instruments and covering a variety of vocals is something Riehl enjoys after three years of performing Eagles songs for audiences across North America.

"We love all the Eagles' songs and when we switch places, it keeps things fresh for us as performers and keeps us invested. All the band members are really accomplished musicians, so we can switch roles seamlessly. I subbed for Andy Lapointe—our regular bass player—tonight."

When asked about the best part of playing to such receptive, energized crowds as he saw on Wednesday night, Riehl observed that there are at least "two things I love about it"—first, when you look out at the crowd and you've got grandparents and grandchildren singing the words together. The Eagles' music bonds three generations of music lovers and that's so great to see. Second, I love the Eagles' repertoire—the range of songs offers this great blend of rock and country and ballads and hard rock sounds. It seems as if

every song is from a different genre of music and that makes it fun to perform.?

Riehl also praised the vocal and drumming talents of one of Hotel California's youngest group members, Gabriel Geammaria, both during the performance and in our post-concert interview.

?He sounds like Don Henley. He drums like Don Henley. He even looks like a young Don Henley.?

Riehl's assessment of his bandmate was in no way steeped in hyperbole as Geammaria replicated the lead vocals of the Eagles classics at the heart of Wednesday's concert, including the first two songs: ?One of These Nights? and ?Witchy Woman.?

Geammaria's sound-alike vocals captured the rich essence of ?Nights??one of the Henley's greatest performances as an Eagle. Geammaria's vocal range was on display in ?Witchy Woman? as he hit Henley's high howls and captured the eerie nature of one of the Eagles' earliest hits.

But Geammaria's best vocal performance of the evening occurred during the fourth song of the concert in his delivery of ?Wasted Time.? Supported by the soaring and poignant keyboard work of Marko Stojanovich, Geammaria's soulful delivery of this mournful classic was the finest of tributes to arguably Henley's richest composition.

Complementing the performances of his bandmates was the most versatile of Hotel California's talented performers: rock veteran Al Langlade. His guitar work and vocals charmed a capacity crowd. Langlade, who covers the Glenn Frey and Randy Meisner vocals, clearly enjoys his work based on his on-stage antics, his interplay with front line bandmates Riehl and Stojanovich, and his remarks in our pre-concert interview.

?The best part of being in a tribute band is the people we meet at the shows. People are all the same whether they be Canadians or Americans when it comes to the music of the Eagles. We feed off the energy of our audiences who love this music.?

The energetic Langlade replicated Frey's lead vocals in ?New Kid in Town?, ?Lyn' Eyes?, ?Take It Easy?, and ?Already Gone?, hit Meisner's high notes in ?Take it to the Limit? with help from ?his tight pants and a G-string? as he noted humorously, and empathized with Henley's divorce pangs and the wish for forgiveness in ?Heart of the Matter.?

At the heart of Hotel California is the band's four-part harmonies and cohesive guitar work. Both were especially enjoyable in the presentation of the band's signature song.

Lead vocals delivered by Geammaria captured the dystopian elements of Henley's haunted hotel.

Don Felder and Joe Walsh's dueling guitars were replicated centre stage by Stojanovich and Langlade?a fine tribute to the layered musical genius built into ?Hotel California? by Felder just before he left the band at its peak of popularity.

Geammaria's offered more magical moments in his encore vocals as he covered Henley's reflective tones in ?Desperado?. The band's presentation of this ballad inspired thousands of sparks of light as illuminated cell phones created a layer of low-lying stars under the park's starry skies.

?Life in the Fast Lane? closed the concert with great bass runs by Riehl, Stojanovic's lead guitar work provided stirring centre stage moments, and Geammaria captured the classic rock tune from the band's fifth studio album Hotel California.

Hotel California's website claims the band offers ?a masterful celebration of the Eagles' music? and Mayor Tom Mrakas concurred with this assessment and praised the natural beauty of the concert's setting.

?It's great to be at beautiful Town Park on a Wednesday night and listen to music with fellow Aurorans. Rain or shine?we have this great nice dance area, it has grassed seating zones, and great acts like Hotel California. I've seen them before and mentioned to

Shelley Ware that had to get Hotel California for our concert series. Great musicians and this Bandshell make this place so special on a summer evening.?

By Jim Stewart