Outlaw State of Mind celebrates the country music hits of Chris Stapleton at Town Park

Aurora's Concerts in the Park series?proudly presented by TD?took a decidedly deep dive into the Country Music genre on Wednesday night at smoky Town Park.

After four consecutive days of air quality warnings due to wildfires compromising cottage country, the Outlaw State of Mind quartet emerged from the miasma blanketing Southern Ontario and delivered the greatest hits of Chris Stapleton to an appreciative crowd.

More than 1,000 fans of the prolific Kentucky-born songwriter and performer packed the Park to enjoy the soaring vocals and commanding stage presence of the tribute band's front man Dave McNab. A freezing cold Bes Lite?purchased for $8 from the Market Brewery's beer and cooler tent?made the evening even more enjoyable.

McNab, who hails from Sudbury and is a Chris Stapleton look-alike, can hold a note longer than Donald Trump holds an imagined grudge. The big-bearded front man delighted the crowd when he strung out a note during ?You're the Joy of My Life? then wooed the group early in the band's first set with his disclosure that he ?got married about a month ago? and dedicated ?Luckiest Man Alive? to his new bride.

The soulful rendition was received warmly and, as the quartet delivered ?White Horse?, McNab showed his good sense of humor when an errant beach ball from the dance floor denizens crash-landed on his guitar in mid-song.

No such obstructions affected the band's opening number, ?Outlaw State of Mind?, which showcased lead guitarist Carter Morin's talents. Morin's guitar work and McNab's soaring voice carried the group's fast-paced opening set.

One of the highlights of the evening was the line dancing lesson provided by Rose who put over one hundred aspirants through their paces. The activity was loved by attendees of all ages as they moved impressively in unison in six long lines spanning the bandshell's dance floor.

McNab opened the second set with a pair of engaging and poignant acoustic numbers. ?Nobody to Blame? and ?Whiskey and You??originally penned by Tim McGraw-- were both received enthusiastically by the line dancers.

The talented tribute band closed the concert with two of Stapleton's greatest hits: a hard-driving version of ?Midnight Train to Memphis? and the strategically-placed ?Tennessee Whiskey? which saddened me to think about the consequences of the ill-conceived tariff war. Wednesday's concert was about as close as an Ontarian can get to Tennessee Whiskey ? or to Kentucky Bourbon for that matter.

McNab was in fine form as the encore concluded and adoring fans of all ages milled about the stage in search of post-concert photos with the dynamic and obliging performer.

As we conducted our interview stage left at a Town Park picnic table, McNab was still stoked about the attendees' reaction to the band's performance: ?What a receptive audience. They were so welcoming and definitely engaged. This type of show is sometimes tough to gauge since it's between a festival performance and a bar setting.?

He discussed the joys of performing Stapleton's music and its broad appeal.

?Chris's music hits a broad demographic. It's so soulful and has its roots in the blues. It's loved by a wide group of music fans. [Lead guitarist] Carter Morin and I have been playing Chris's songs for over eight years and it's created the on-stage chemistry that we have. I grew up with his parents in Sudbury so I know his family well.?

McNab offered some personal insights into the satisfaction of singing Chris Stapleton's hits.

?As vocalists, we're always struggling to find out what our voice is. He was somebody that stuck with me. The soul that he brings to country music and bringing it alive on stage is something that has really worked for me.?

Hundreds of fans who attended McNab's performance on Wednesday night would concur with the vocalist's self-assessment?his rich, on-stage stylings brought Stapleton's soulful country music to life and it was evident that it really worked for them, too.

By Jim Stewart