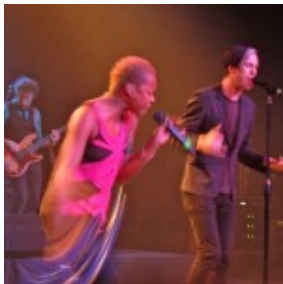


Fitz and the Tantrums keep music fans on their feet

By Susan Wood

STATELINE — Don't let their name fool you. Fitz and the Tantrums provided a mixed generation of concert-goers who rocked the Harrah's Lake Tahoe South Shore Room Saturday night with an adult-sized performance.

The packed crowd rewarded the high-energy band with hours of screaming, clapping, dancing, partying and encroaching on the stage to get close to the Los Angeles-based band that has captivated many who follow the music scene.



Fitz and the Tantrums had most of the Harrah's Lake Tahoe audience on its feet Jan. 28. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Harrah's cleared a large dance floor next to the stage. Many fans started there on their feet for the opening act of Dale Earnhardt Jr. The alternative, synthesizer-driven singing duo Daniel Zott and Josh Epstein, with their custom painted plaid jackets, could have crossed as retro male Talking Heads or

B-52s. Zott led the twosome for its “We Almost Lost Detroit” but rounded out the funk-rock experience with a near Beatle-like sound and even included Whitney Houston’s smash hit “I Want to Dance With Somebody”.

That’s what warm-up bands are designed to do – get the crowd going. The dance floor soon filled up in anticipation of Fitz.

“Hey, Lake Tahoe – wanna party?” asked 38-year-old lead singer Michael Fitzgerald, aka “Fitz,” who told *Lake Tahoe News* in an earlier interview he was named by his childhood friends because “there were too many Michaels in the world.”

One thing is abundantly clear – fans have an original in Fitz and the Tantrums. Since the soulful Fitz found an organ on a curb and was consequently discovered by Adam Levine of hit band Maroon 5 the group has not looked back. In three years, they have made a name for themselves well beyond Southern California.

Take the inventive quality of a Phil Spector sound, a pure dance-hall atmosphere, lyrics of the romantically tortured and seductive chemistry between Fitz and co-lead singer Noelle Scaggs, and you have the Tantrums. (Incidentally, albeit a stage act to the contrary, Fitz and Scaggs – who uses a tambourine in conjunction with her towering vocal chords – are not a romantic item.)

With precision and passion, the six-member band consisting of Fitz, Scaggs, saxophonist James King, drummer John Wicks, bassist Joseph Karnes and keyboardist Jeremy Ruzumna cut through all their songs released on its lone album “Pickin Up the Pieces”. The song list included the breakthrough tune “Breaking the Chains of Love,” lovelorn ballad “Tighter” and chart climber “Money Grabber” as the encore. And yet, the band even added an Annie Lennox top hit “Sweet Dreams” for good measure.

The band ended a near monthlong tour at Harrah’s in time to go

home to work on another album.

Throughout the save-the-best-for-last concert, the audience was on its feet – a testament to the electric energy on stage. Wicks sometimes pounded the drums as quickly as a camera motor drive. Without missing a beat, King rotated his flute and sax. Fitz stomped his feet to the beat when he wasn't caressing the mic. Multi-tasking, Scaggs exercised her tambourine wrist and vocal chords so intensely, she often dropped the instrument at the end of the songs in apparent exhaustion.

She resumed with a smile and acknowledgement to the fans: "Are your lungs warmed up yet?"

The band only rested long enough for Ruzumna to leave his keyboards for a birthday cake wheeled out on stage.

"I so wanted to put his face in it," Fitz joked.

Fun, frolic and lyrics as a bit of a war of the sexes made up the norm for the show, along with audience participation. Some concert-goers, who were of all ages, crowded the stage when Fitz sat close to the edge on a speaker. One male fan standing up front, who kept reaching for Scaggs, even impressed her when she allowed him to sing into the mic.

"That was awesome," she said, seemingly surprised.

This was the operative word of the high-energy concert from a band that has exuded a perfect mix of soul, independent, Motown and rock-pop rhythms in an uncommonly short period of time for a punishing industry.

To this day, Fitz told *Lake Tahoe News* he's still surprised by the band's cult-like popularity. The band ended the concert with a genuine thank you to the fans, which included taking photos with fans and signing anything put in front of them.

"With the amount of time we've put into this, it seems more like five or six years (have gone by). It's a journey that's

felt like the longest marathon any of us ever have gone through,” he said during the interview.

Fitz labeled the last three years as going “to the moon and back.” The Tantrums have appeared on cooking guru and music lover Rachael Ray’s show, played to thousands in the acoustically-superior Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Boulder, Colo., and shared the stage with Maroon 5.

Maroon 5, the popular, contemporary band that has sold 17 million albums with hits from “She Will Be Loved” to today’s “Moves Like Jagger” – will make a July 21 showing during the weekend of the American Century Championship played at Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course for Harveys Outdoor Summer Concert Series. Tickets go on sale Feb. 24.

Harrah’s fills out the winter season at the South Shore Room with the longtime soul favorite Tower of Power on Feb. 4, rock band Los Lonely Boys Feb. 11, pop singer Kenny Loggins on Feb. 18 and the youthful ensemble of G. Love & Special Sauce on Feb. 25.

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