McLachlan sings her way into fans' hearts



Sarah McLachlan's talents include singing, song writing, guitar and piano playing. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – Singer-composer-musician Sarah McLachlan left no mystery about what kind of summer Harveys expects to provide as she led off a blockbuster lineup of artists for this summer's outdoor concert series.

Diverse, prolific, prominent and up close and personal.

McLachlan didn't miss a beat in her trademark personable style and self-made emotionally charged ballads the minute she hit the stage to start the concert series Tuesday – now in its 13th season.

“We have a lot more big names,” entertainment director John Packer told *Lake Tahoe News* before McLachlan took the stage.

The stage was set as a quasi nightclub with circular rings of light bulbs that changed color with the mood of the songs. They rotated between her well-known hits off her “Surfacing” LP and new album “Shine On” released in May for which the tour was named.

“This album for me was about gratitude – recognizing the things I’m grateful for. I’m just so blessed,” McLachlan said.

Beyond her successful career, she was the founder of the now defunct Lilith Fair that was dedicated to providing venues for female artists, has a school of music for inner city children, and is a supporter to the ASPCA to benefit animals.



Sarah McLachlan split her time between piano and guitar.

Dressed in a shimmery silver, sleeveless top, she launched the June 24 concert with her mega hit “Building a Mystery” off “Surfacing.” In 1991, this number was recognized as VH1’s 100 Greatest Songs of the ’90s.

Next, she jumped to “In Your Shoes,” the first track off the new album. The CD is a dual compilation for the lovelorn because break-up songs “have to be discussed.”

Then, there was love found, more specifically written for “her sweetie” on the new song “Brink of Destruction.” She laughed at the notion the title didn’t sound happy. But for the most part, it’s the type of collection of songs to lounge on the sofa with on a rainy day, or a warm summer Tahoe day.

“It’s so gorgeous here. You are so lucky to be living here,” she told the audience. And someone yelled out to make sure she was staying hydrated in the high elevation, something she noticed even with her noted breathy vocal delivery. “Yes, I’m drinking a lot. Thank you.”

She even took pre-submitted questions out of a top hat.

What’s her favorite place to travel? She rattled off New Zealand and Russia. But she further admitted her favorite place is her Vancouver, British Columbia, homeland. More personal, some asked about the most exotic place she’s made love – the bow of a boat.

With that, McLachlan never strayed from showing her personal side. She let the audience in on a secret. She admitted to stealing some “big ass” pine cones from Tahoe.

While many musicians connect with fans, McLachlan did in an unusual way. Names had been drawn to join her on stage in a living room set up for them to get the close-up perspective. It was all a part of what the artist-activist-philanthropist refers to as a way “to create positive social change.”

The participants on the sofas certainly enjoyed the gesture. They danced to the upbeat “Sweet Surrender,” chatted between sets and took selfies to spread the message of goodwill.

One woman told McLachlan that she’d been a fan for almost 20

years, and the song “Possession” changed her life.



Sarah McLachan has redefined front row for fans.

With more than 40 million albums sold worldwide, the Canadian native has made a longstanding career from her compositions, soulful ballads and diverse appearances.

From the song “Angel” featured in the hit movie “City of Angels” starring Meg Ryan and the sweet tune “Ordinary Miracle” for the “Charlotte’s Web” animated film, the artist has used her songwriting talents in a number of ways. Along with “Angel,” she performed in 2011 the other mega hit “I Will Remember You” to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 at the Pennsylvania plane crash site. The place marks where passengers fought back hijackers and brought down the plane.

She also composed the official theme song for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver – “One Dream.”

But for all the grand-scale awards, recognitions and worldwide acclaim, it’s the one-on-one intimacy that McLachlan is best known for. In between weaving in and out of albums with her musical sets, the latest includes a special tribute to her father who died four years ago.

“My dad was really an anchor for me,” she said of “Song For My Father.”

With the launch of that single, McLachlan earlier invited people through social media to submit photos with their fathers to be featured on her video.

McLachlan also gave the attentive crowd a glimpse of her family commitments with the new song “Beautiful Girl,” a tune dedicated to her two girls, ages 7 and 12. The lyrics are both sentimental and nostalgic for anyone who recalls the angst in coming of age.

“We’re gonna push on through, pretty girl

Just like we always do, beautiful girl

I know the world can be cruel, pretty girl

You’re gonna make it ‘cause you’ve got love on your side.”

The artist’s comfort level on stage was often apparent with her free-flowing arm gestures, passionate facial expressions and rocking-out dance movements. It was refreshing to see. And not every singer who writes about “your love is better than ice cream” can be taken seriously – even with a band as serious as hers.

With John Evans on bass, Curt Bisquera on drums, Joel Shearer on guitar and Vincent Jones (of Alanis Morissette fame) on keyboards, the group gripped the precision of a recording studio outdoors. And McLachlan’s signature high-range vocal chords held up better than ever. Her trick – “drinking warm water and honey” before performances.

The other reason the acoustics that night were so great for vocals is the sound engineering was superior, a change from the usual too-hot instruments drowning out the singers found at many outdoor concerts.



Four band members complement Sarah McLachlan’s music and vocals.

As professional as they were on stage, the group seemed to enjoy themselves. McLachlan had a commanding stage presence – whether standing with a guitar or sitting quietly down with her Yamaha grand piano.

“I want to say I’m having so much fun,” McLachlan admitted.

She must have been. After an expected encore of “Angel” – which brought a hush over the night, she broke out the ukulele and played it like she was hanging out at the beach.

“This was my very first instrument. I started playing it at 4 years old,” she said, breaking in the tune “The Sound that Love Makes” off the new album.

“This was better than expected, even as a fan,” Diane Berkovatz of Reno said.

McLachlan keeps up her Shine On tour at UC Berkeley’s Greek Theater on Friday night; the Greek in Los Angeles the following evening; and Humphreys in San Diego on Sunday.

The Harveys Outdoor Summer Concert Series also continues with country music acts Carrie Underwood on July 18; Zac Brown Band two nights later; rock band Train on July 25 and ’80s group Journey with the Steve Miller Band five days later.

With the South Shore noticeably picking up more summer traffic, the concerts “create a buzz” that coincides with a

busy season, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority Executive Director Carol Chaplin told *Lake Tahoe News*.