

Browne delivers hope and steel guitar



Jackson Browne wows the crowd at Harveys on Aug. 7.
Photos/Kim Wyatt

By Kim Wyatt

STATELINE – I had a whole review written in my mind comparing and contrasting Jackson Browne’s performance of his post-Watergate hit “The Pretender” to the previous evening’s Republican debate. And then he didn’t sing it. So this review will have to be simply about a master songwriter and the large, intimate crowd gathered Aug. 7 at the Lake Tahoe Outdoor Arena at Harveys.

I first saw Jackson Browne when I was 10 years old. It was my first concert, and my dad took me. (I think he couldn’t find a babysitter.) Between this and Buffalo Springfield always

spinning in our house, you'd think my dad was trying to make a little radical. Browne's Summer 2015 "Standing in the Breach" tour – so named for his 14th album inspired by events in Haiti – still amplifies his political mindset, but it was his intimate numbers that moved the crowd. Songs like "These Days" and "Fountain of Sorrow" sandwiched in between lyrics about fracking and corporate corruption, even a love song to the ocean, made for a weirdly satisfying emotional roller coaster – a cycle of hope and despair that fortunately ended on hope. Browne's gift as a songwriter has always been to give voice to our most personal existential crises, to be our Everyman, yet in naming it, he makes us no longer alone. It's a neat trick, and a wild, singular talent.



Jackson Browne is a singer, songwriter and musician.

The 20-song set plus two encores were anchored by Browne's polished band. Greg Leisz delivered on lap and pedal steel guitar, and the electric guitar was handled deftly by Val McCallum. Bob Glaub (bass), Mauricio Lewak (drums) and Jeff Young (Hammond organ, piano) brought up the rhythm section. Alethea Mills offered harmony and the solo vocals that we were all waiting for, so familiar was this crowd with Browne's oeuvre, an almost full house of former hippies, environmentalists and child radicals like myself, I suspect. (A portion of the proceeds from Browne's concerts and sales goes to The Guacamole Fund, a group that supports grassroots

social justice and environmental activities.)

From the first note, the audience knew almost every song. Browne's usual tropes of love and despair, along with the signature steel guitar, were immediately in play: The first song, "The Barricades of Heaven," left no doubt that Browne's new tunes didn't stray far from the old, and made me curious about the new album. His voice still strong and steady, Browne has a knack for making everything seem better and worse at the same time. "The Long Way Around" featured some sweet Allmanesque guitar from McCallum, who shone throughout the night, as did Leisz's omnipresent steel guitar.

One cool surprise of the evening was the appearance of Nevada City's Bob Schafer, one of Browne's mentors, taking the stage for a tender rendition of Hank Williams Sr.'s "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" – a heart-tugging experience under the stars.

After a 10-minute break, the crew returned for the last set. The audience began shouting out Browne's hits. Warm and friendly, he asked us to be patient. Well, maybe not so warm. His hair blowing in the chilly night wind, Browne, from Los Angeles, gave the Tahoe crowd a great compliment: "Thanks for having us, Tahoe. You're hardy people."

After a four-song set from his new album that focused largely on the environment – which got the audience fist pumping, this is Tahoe, after all – Browne yielded and gave the crowd what they wanted: "Doctor My Eyes" and a rousing "Running on Empty" that led to two encores: "Take It Easy," – which Browne co-wrote with Glenn Frey – and the iconic sing-along "The Load Out/Stay."

Browne left the crowd dancing, on their feet, flushed and happy. Yet the sentiment of the night might be wrapped in up this lyric from "Standing in the Breach": *"You don't know why,/But you still try for the world you wish to see."*

So, idealism is alive and well and a little bit older. Despite

modern life, its depredations and defeats, there is no room for apathy, Browne seems to say. We've made it through some dark and lonely times, but we've still got work to do: Let's do it together.