

Three Dog Night deserves better recognition

By John Charles Lewis

In 1970, a young and talented piano player from England found himself as the opening act for a band that, according to ThreeDogNight.com “from 1969 through 1974 achieved more top 10 hits, moved more records and sold more concert tickets than any other band”, including the Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Who and Led Zeppelin.

That’s just part of the story of the journey of Three Dog Night’s show Saturday night at MontBleu Casino in Stateline.

Back in 1967, a 17-year-old songwriter named Bernie Taupin was writing songs that soon would be recognized as masterpieces, including the first charted hit for the 1970 opening act for Three Dog Night, Elton John.

According to Song Facts, Taupin said, “The original lyric was written very rapidly on the kitchen table of Elton’s mother’s apartment in Northwood Hills in the suburbs of London, if I recall, on a particularly grubby piece of exercise paper.” Taupin wrote “Your Song”.

On Aug. 1, Three Dog Night brought its headlining show back to Caesars in Tahoe. OK, it’s not the 1970s anymore, so now its the MontBleu Resort, but nonetheless, the show gave the aging crowd a chance to relive their youth as the crowd returned to their celebrity ball as they celebrated their youth and danced to the music.

Three Dog Night was formed in 1967 by three talented vocalists: Chuck Negron, Cory Wells and Danny Hutton. Negron is no longer with the band, but Wells and Hutton and original guitarist Michael Allsup we’re all in fine form, along with

longtime members Paul Kingery on bass and Pat Bautz on drums. Eddie Reasoner replaced long time member Jimmy Greenspan on keyboards after Greenspan passed away last year from cancer.

The show had many highlights, including a soulful cover of Randy Newman's "You Can Leave Your Hat On" as well as solid renditions of their timeless hits "Out in the Country", "Joy to the World", "One" and "Shambala".

Three Dog Night has always been known for its ability to recognize the talents of other songwriters, and no example is more profound than with the 1970 album "It Ain't Easy", which included another Newman cover in "Mama Told Me (Not To Come)". Their version of this song at Saturday's show was spot on. Mid-song they stopped and told a story of a family friend who claimed this song would be a great rap song. After a quick attitude adjustment and change of outfits, they turned this former No. 1 song into a very entertaining rap song, and when they asked the crowd which version they liked better, surprisingly, the reaction was even.

On side two of "It Ain't Easy", they recorded "Your Song", which was being played in John's set list when he was Three Dog Night's supporting act as an unknown, undiscovered piano player and aspiring songwriter.

Interestingly, Three Dog Night was considering releasing "Your Song" as their next single back then, but they chose not to so they could give John a chance to release it as the "B-side" to his first single, "Take me to the Pilot", which he did in 1971. Interestingly, "Your Song" became Elton's first hit song, it was later inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, and more than 20 years ago Elton John was elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a well-deserved honor Three Dog Night still awaits.

Next Saturday night, Elton John headlines the much larger Harveys outdoor arena in Stateline and Three Dog Night shares

the bill with Nazareth at the Choctaw Grand Theater in Durant, Okla. It would have been fitting to have Three Dog Night on the bill with John at Harveys, allowing John to return the favor from when Three Dog Night recorded his song "Lady Samantha" in 1969 when no one had heard of Elton John. This way he could help turn a whole new generation on to some of the most pure and classic rock from when rock 'n roll mattered. John could also help expose two new Three Dog Night songs, highlights from the show last night, to a whole new generation of potential fans. The catchy lick in "Heart of Blues" and the powerful vocals from "Prayer of the Children" deserve to be heard.

Maybe next summer the local Tahoe promoters can help John return a much-deserved favor. Who knows, maybe John can even make a phone call to Cleveland to ask why Three Dog Night is not the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, an honor that is definitely deserved based on statistics alone.