

## Still going country: Alan Jackson solid in delivering classics at Germain sold-out show

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ESTERO — The conductor saying “all aboard” wasn’t needed. Alan Jackson’s new album and tour might be labeled the “Freight Train” but this hit machine has been rolling along for over two decades. He emphasized it with his performance on Thursday night at Germain Arena.

His career, which started in the mailroom and will soon be cemented with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, is a powerful locomotive that doesn’t appear to be losing any steam. Kicking off his Freight Train Tour, the 51-year-old banked on his countless, and timeless, classics and didn’t make the sold-out crowd suffer through a plethora of new releases just to sell albums. Instead, Jackson played a 21-plus song set, with only one song (“It’s Just that Way”) coming from the new release, in the two-hour show.

The show wasn’t flashy. It wasn’t theatrical. Jackson didn’t dance around or get wild. It was simple as the white cowboy hat on his head and as strong as a steel guitar in the background. It was simply classic Alan Jackson.

He started the show with “Gone Country,” followed by “Summertime Blues” as the 8,000 person sing-along started dancing even in the cheap seats. Jackson showed his sentimental side displaying photos of his parents on the big screen TVs during “Livin’ on Love.”

With his guitar in hand, Jackson masterfully transitioned from soft tear-producers such as “A Woman’s Love” and his 9/11 tribute “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)” to the hip shaking, two-stepping signature tunes of “Little Bitty,” “Who’s Cheatin’ Who” and “Don’t Rock the Jukebox.”

Jackson even found a solution to the enviable dilemma of having 25 No. 1 songs and over 50 albums. In the middle of the set, Jackson and the band got cozy and took a seat to pump out an abbreviated medley of hits with history lessons behind them. He told about touring with Randy Travis in the early 1990s and the two co-wrote some songs, one of which “She’s Got the Rhythm” went to No. 1. (By the way, Travis netted three No.1s from the Jackson collaborations). Jackson explained “Neon Rainbow” was about the first radio his father bought, which now sits in the Country Music Hall of Fame. And he said he wrote “Wanted” (a good-hearted woman) on a rainy day in a hotel room in Pine Bluff, Ark. He ended the 11-song medley with the 2001 hit “Drive,” which was written as a tribute to his dying father.

But just when you thought he might take a break the lanky and ageless looking Jackson cranked it up again with “Good Time,” “Country Boy,” “It’s Five O’clock Somewhere” and “Chattahoochee.”

The only time Jackson got the least bit derailed was when he welcomed the crowd and stumbled on the “Freight Train” tour. One of the only disappointments, other than he didn’t sing my personal favorite “I Still Like Bologna” and the show had to come to an end, was that the video montage behind Jackson’s finale “Where I Come from” showed mainly pictures of Bonita Springs and didn’t capture the true essence of Southwest Florida. Also, Jackson only came out for a one-song encore, the Jerry Lee Lewis classic “Great Balls Fire.” But who could blame him as he covered almost ever hit song in two hours. Jackson appears ready to get rolling on tour, especially after a week of fishing and sun in Florida, he said.

Actually, Southwest Florida country fans got their money’s worth. Up-and-comer Chris Young started the show and, while brief, he didn’t disappoint with his hit-song “Getting You Home (Black Dress).” Josh Turner followed with a performance worthy of a headliner. With his versatile range and especially some of those “money maker” bass notes, the 32-year-old showed why he might not be long for being a warm-up act. With hits “Why Don’t We Just Dance” (My personal favorite right now), “Your Man” and “Would You Go With Me,” Turner set the tone for the conductor, Alan Jackson.

The three were a perfect complement to each other, transcending a traditional country sound and performance to match. They were simple. They had a classic sound and they were “right on the money” – especially considering the highest priced ticket was under \$100.



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