

La Russa's benefit show mixes rock, comedy, celebs

By Daniel Durchholz

SPECIAL TO THE POST-DISPATCH

Monday, Jan. 18 2010

Tony La Russa told the audience at his ARF Stars to the Rescue benefit Sunday night that the show was constructed a little bit like an All-Star Game.

"You don't ask people to do their whole show," he said. "You ask them to pitch a couple innings, take a couple at bats."

Just so, the six individual sets performed at Chaifetz Arena were kept short and sweet, but the lineup was deep and varied, representing country music, classic and alternative rock, and comedy.

Headliner Dierks Bentley didn't rock the house, as per usual, but instead offered a breezy, stripped-down acoustic performance that was well stocked with hits, including "Free and Easy (Down the Road I Go)," "Feel That Fire," "I Wanna Make You Close Your Eyes" and "What Was I Thinkin'."

Bentley struck just the right note for the evening's finale: intimate, but raucous enough.

Kathleen Madigan did something not every comedian can manage to do — kill in her hometown. Some of the many laughs were at the expense of her parents, whom she said once tried but failed to hire some Amish roofers. ("You can't call the [S.O.B's]," her father fumed.)

Other topics included gay marriage, Oprah, maundering "American Idol" judge Paula Abdul ("I haven't seen that much drinking on TV since 'Bewitched,'" Madigan said) and entertaining the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Recalling a general showing her a map of the infrastructure improvements Americans had made, Madigan quipped, "When we're done here, we should invade Detroit."

Styx founder Dennis DeYoung offered a preview of his Feb. 12 Family Arena show, playing some of his former band's biggest hits, including "Lady," "Babe" and "Come Sail Away."

Journey keyboardist Jonathan Cain backed his 16-year-old daughter Madison on a pair of tunes (with her younger brother Westin on drums), then played the event-appropriate tune "Man's Best Friend" and a medley of his group's hits.

Also on the bill were Kennett, Mo., native David Nail, whose brief set marked him as a definite talent to watch, and Chicago-based alt-rockers the Lovehammers.

Among the many sports celebrities in attendance were Blues president John Davidson, Rams coach Steve Spagnuolo, Cardinals legend Red Schoendienst, GM John Mozeliak, and players Chris Carpenter, Adam Wainwright, Ryan Franklin, Ryan Ludwick, Kyle Lohse, Kyle McClellan, Brad Penny, Skip Schumaker, hitting coach Mark McGwire — who got a standing ovation when introduced — and former Cards Mike Matheny and Jim Edmonds.

Edmonds surprised everyone — seemingly even the host — when he jumped on stage at the end of the show and announced that he was "challenging" La Russa to allow him to return to the Cardinals and play for free. He quickly changed his mind and said, "Maybe for the [league] minimum."

La Russa seemed a little nonplussed by the offer, but smiled and said, "We'll consider it."

If you enjoy reading about interesting news, you might like the 3 O'Clock Stir from STLtoday.com. Sign up and you'll receive an email with unique stories of the day, every Monday-Friday, at no charge.

Sign up at <http://newsletters.stltoday.com>

