

Montgomery Gentry gives a taste of the south

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Montgomery Gentry and the Road Hammers add Southern rock to the windy city. New country, which has been dominating the airwaves for almost 20 years now, isn't really country at all. It's really southern rock played with big, loud Gibson Les Pauls and Explorers (rather than the twangy Telecasters which usually mark country music), turned to the max and drop D tuned. But it does appeal to even the most base city slicker's inner redneck. Because they sing about real people, real problems, drinking, carousing, hot rods and hillbillies. That, and the fact I surprisingly didn't see any amps at all, was what I noticed the most about the Montgomery Gentry and Road Hammers concert at the Enmax Centre, which had a dismal turn out, May 12. It's too bad. And it's a good thing all of the Road Hammers and Montgomery Gentry hits (and there were plenty of hits to be had) have easily recognizable riffs and easily identifiable choruses, because the sound mix was wretched.

The Road Hammers kicked some serious butt first, playing on a sparse stage decorated by a semi truck replete with smoking stacks in front of the drum riser. Jason McCoy and Albertan guitarist Clayton Bellamy and bassist Chris Byrne, had energy and then some. The Hammers roared through a set of high volume and high octane songs meant for anybody behind the wheel of a semi, SUV or even motor scooter. They played so many detuned guitar riffs, I thought I was at a grunge show, but with a lot more cowboy hats. They also played some sweet twin guitar leads which would do Lynard Skynard or the Outlaws proud. The Smokey and the Bandit theme, "East Bound and Down" was a highlight right near the beginning and they played a lot of the music from their new, second CD Roadhammers II and all of their big hits, "Girl on the Billboard," "I'm a Roadhammer" "Homegrown," and the new single "Scars to Prove It." I always like hearing new music from big acts.

But McCoy even snuck in his big solo hit "Born Again in Dixieland," which was a hoot, because I used to play that song in a country band back in the day. And how's this for cool? The Hammers promised to meet everyone after their set and ended up signing autographs for throngs of enthusiastic fans in the concourse right through most of Montgomery Gentry's set. I've been looking forward to seeing Montgomery Gentry play for several years, mainly because my country band also used to cover their big hit "Hillbilly Shoes" But also because they cover a lot of songs from my favourite Nashville songwriter Jeffrey Steele. So they made my night by playing "Your Tears are Coming" which is on their CD, Some People Change, however I prefer Steele's original which was on his 2006 solo CD "Hell on Wheels" They did justice to other Steele hits like "My Town," "Speed," "Something to be Proud of," "Hell Yeah" and "Gone" which ended their energetic set around 10 p.m. They had two lead guitarists who played some sweet dual leads, a slide guitarist, a keyboardist /harmonica player, bassist, drummer and an acoustic guitarist who was drowned out by everyone else.

Eddie Montgomery and Troy Gentry were having fun on stage, with Montgomery, clad in an outlaw trench coat and flat brimmed black cowboy hat, grinning a mile wide, while twirling his microphone, and Gentry taking his turn on guitar. They harmonized well, when you could hear them. And they do a pretty mean hillbilly dance too.

I enjoyed several of the new songs, "One in every Crowd" stood out as did "Long Line of Losers" and "What Do Ya Think About That"