

April 21, 2011, an Induction Concert that I will never forget.

John Denver was the first person to be inducted into the brand new Colorado Hall of Fame, along with beautiful Red Rocks Amphitheater. A sold out concert was held on the 21st to honor John in the new 6,500 seat 1stBank Amphitheater, in Broomfield, CO, half way between Boulder and Denver.

Before the concert, we were able to walk most of the way around the inside of the stadium, to see wonderful memorabilia relating to John and his life. We could look at some displays that will be permanent in the 1stBank Center; a tour jacket, sheet music, his photos, his jumbo guitar, his wonderful peace guitar strap, his gold record for “Rocky Mountain High” and one for “Will the Circle Be Unbroken 3”, and a few of the outfits he wore on stage. The family had loaned John’s Montana belt buckle, his granny glasses, a cowboy hat, and more items. Upstairs, there were displays showing Red Rock’s music performances, as there are displays at Red Rocks Amphitheatre, too.

There was a beautiful new bronze bust of John in the lobby, and huge painting of John by Brian Olsen to be sold at auction to benefit the Colorado Music Hall of Fame. I haven’t heard yet, who put in the highest bid.



After sitting down, the first thing that surprised all of us, was a spot light showing only on the front left side of the stage, and the artist Brian Olsen came out and painted another copy of the portrait of John, using his hands dipped into paint cans. While he was painting the John’s head, which was taller than he was, “Rocky Mountain High” and “Country Roads” were playing. It was fascinating for all of us to see this face of John’s evolve in front of us, and we wonder who got the highest bidder on that one, too, to benefit the Colorado Music Hall of Fame.

Lee Holdridge was introduced as the music director. He directed many different orchestras during John’s career and composed amazing arrangements for all the instruments. During most of the songs that evening, Lee conducted the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra. They started with orchestral versions that Lee arranged years ago, of “Thank God I’m a Country Boy”, “The Eagle and The Hawk”, “Annie’s Song” and “Country Road’s”.

The audience was thrilled when John’s three “kids” came out on stage; Zak, Anna Kate, and Jesse Belle. We were introduced to the former Mayor of Denver, John Hickenlooper, who is now the popular governor of Colorado; the present mayor of Denver, and congressman, Bill Vidal. Mr. Hickenlooper presented the John’s “kids” with a plaque that honors John’s induction into the Colorado Music Hall of Fame, and

Mr. Vidal accepted a plaque for the induction of Red Rocks Amphitheater into the Hall of Fame. Mr Vidal told us of the many music stars that have played there, including John, who did 17 concerts there.



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We were all surprised when Mike Wood, a NASA Astronaut in a blue NASA jumpsuit appeared to speak about John's keen interest in Space Exploration and showed us a short video of space happenings, accompanied by music from the movie "Star Wars".

Olivia Newton John was the mistress of ceremonies (MC) for the evening. She related that John and Annie invited her to Thanksgiving dinner in 1975 and also that in Australia, she was neighbors with Cassie and Jesse Belle and that Jesse Belle would frequently play with Olivia's daughter.

The first tribute song, "Wild Montana Skies" was sung and played by Poco and Richie Furay, who used to be in the group "Buffalo Springfield" and now sings mostly religious songs as a pastor of a Colorado church. Bill Danoff and Olivia, sang "Country Roads" and Bill told us about how he, Taffy, and John finished it together and how it became so successful so quickly.

"Poems, Prayers, and Promises" was sung by two members of Eric Johnson's band called, "The Fruit Bats". John Sommers led Jim Connor and John McEuen, etc,

from the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band on a rousing “Thank God I’m a Country Boy” while the audience was clapping and grinning ear to ear.



Both Jim Salestrom and Trace Bundy played beautiful guitar on the “Late Winter Early Spring” instrumental. Then Michael Martin Murphey in beautiful cowboy regalia, told us how special it was to him that John often sang two of his songs. He told how he was thinking of St. Francis of Assisi when he wrote “Boy From the Country” but that the song fit John and his love of nature and wild animals just as well. Steve Weisberg joined MMM in the song and was so touched when MMM talked about his experiences with John.

When Mark Ross from the organization “Rock the Earth” spoke about John Denver’s influence on environmental issues, he mentioned that famous musicians that came after John, “walked the trail that John Denver made” when it came to helping Mother

Earth.

John Oates talked about hearing John play guitar and singing in a small Aspen inn back in the 1960s, at the time when “Leaving on a Jet Plane” rose to number one in the charts. John Oates’ version of the song, was a bluesy-jazzy version with not one of the major chords we are used to hearing in the song.

Just before intermission, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band with John McEuen talked about the time they played at the Farm Aid Concert with John, and then went on to sing “Back Home Again”. There was such a “FEEL GOOD” sense through the whole audience as the first half of the concert was concluded.

After intermission, when most of the 6,500 visited the displays concerning John and found long lost JD fans (friends/fans) , a generous check was presented from the benefit concert funds to the University of Colorado at Boulder College of Music.



Lee Ann Womack sang “Sunshine on My Shoulders” to an appreciative audience and then Jim Connor played an exciting toe tapping version of “Grandma’s Feather Bed” that he wrote about his grandmother, but John adopted and frequently told audiences that it was about his grandmother. People LOVED the tempo, and joined in, clapping on the back-beats throughout.

“The Jims” were then introduced to the audience and Jim Curry and Jim Salestrom harmonized and played “Perhaps Love.” Olivia congratulated them on their beautiful rendition after a standing ovation. After an environmental talk by Nick Foster, Jesse Belle introduced her mom, Cassie (Cassandra) who talked about being with John at Woods Lake at the cabin as he wrote “Whispering Jesse”, finishing it outdoors in his pajamas, just loving the nature around him there. “Whispering Jesse” is the name of a ski run I’ve skied on, and no doubt John too, at Snowmass Mountain, named well before John wrote the song.



Olivia and John Oates sang “Fly Away, with John O taking John’s part and Olivia bringing us joy with the memories of her singing it with John, years ago. Again, like many, many times, the orchestra back up was so perfect, never overwhelming with Lee conducting, but supporting the singers with kindness.

Two huge beautiful duplicate videos came on, one on each side of the stage, so everyone could see John playing and singing “Annie Song” at the Wildlife Concert. I don’t think there was a dry eye anywhere even when the applause went on and on and



Annie got up with her friend, near where I was sitting, and walked around behind my section of seats, out the left door. I could see that her eyes and tears matched mine and I was afraid that she was walking away from the emotion, but I was wrong. She emerged alone on the stage and gave a heart-felt talk about appreciating us all being there, and talked about John so perfectly and beautifully, that all our hearts were beating with joy. Then it was time for the grand finale that we wanted to go on forever. All the singers and musicians, including the wonderful folks like Chris Nole, Jim Horn, Alan Deremo, Mollie Weaver, etc., went onto the stage, (perhaps 26) and sang “Rocky Mountain High” with the audience. No one wanted the evening to end, so they sang some of the song over again as well as the chorus of “Country Roads”. Afterwards, I didn’t talk to one person, who wasn’t

100% happy about being there, to be a part of this. There were so many huge video cameras held by professionals and that means we are looking forward for it to come out on DVD, and MAY IT HAPPEN !

Judy Therrien

More picture can be found at: <http://jdenver.de/index.php/en/john-denver-photos/fotosjd/hall-of-fame.html>