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AUGUST 22, 2024 BY UCR

Stray Cats

Stray Cats • The Midnight Cowgirls • August 5, 2024 • Red Butte Garden Amphitheater

Reviewed and Photographed by Kevin Rolfe



Photo Credit: Kevin Rolfe

On a warm summer evening, the setting of the Red Butte Garden Amphitheater was electrified by a night of Rockabilly and Country music. Stray Cats took the stage with support from The Midnight Cowgirls. The natural beauty of the amphitheater, nestled against the foothills with its lush gardens and panoramic views, provided a unique contrast to the high-energy performances that followed.

The Midnight Cowgirls



Photo Credit: Kevin Rolfe

The evening began with The Midnight Cowgirls, a rising star in the country music scene. Their performance was a perfect blend of modern country sound with a nod to classic country roots, featuring twangy guitars, tight harmonies, and an infectious stage presence. Their set included crowd favorites like a cover of Juice Newton's, "Queen of Hearts" and Buddy Holly's classic "That'll Be The Day" which had the audience swaying along and tapping their feet.



Photo Credit: Kevin Rolfe

The Midnight Cowgirl's chemistry on stage was evident, and their interaction with the crowd was warm and engaging. Their outfits were well-designed by bassist Jennie Vee. Who is not only the bassist for The Midnight Cowgirls, but I learned that she's been the touring bassist for The Eagles of Death Metal as well. They were the ideal opening act, setting a lively tone and getting the audience primed for The Stray Cats. I thought for a band on their first-ever tour, they were polished and engaging. I could see Utah Country Music fans really getting into this band.

Stray Cats



Photo Credit: Kevin Rolfe

Stray Cats took the stage to an eruption of applause. The iconic Rockabilly band, known for their fusion of rock 'n' roll and punk energy, wasted no time diving into their classic hits. With Brian Setzer's unmistakable twang on the guitar, Lee Rocker's thumping bass lines, and Slim Jim Phantom's tight drumming, the trio launched into "Too Hip, Gotta Go," immediately igniting the crowd.

The setlist was a nostalgic journey through their greatest hits, and some great covers. The second the Red Butte Garden audience recognized the first notes of "Stray Cat Strut," it was clear this was going to be a good night. People were swaying and singing the whole song. The crowd followed their enthusiasm for the music with a cover of Eddie Cochran's "Twenty Flight Rock" and their old classic, "(She's) Sexy + 17."

Each song was met with enthusiastic cheers, and the audience—ranging from die-hard fans from the 80s to a younger generation discovering the band for the first time—danced along to the timeless rhythms. With the concert taking place at Red Butte Garden Amphitheater swing dancing was a little more complicated than it might be in a club or theater. But don't you worry, couples were determined to find a space to swing dance. It was fun to watch.



Photo Credit: Kevin Rolfe

Brian Setzer's guitar work was sharp, delivering crisp, fast-paced solos that showcased his virtuosity. Lee Rocker's slap bass technique provided a powerful backbone to the music, and Slim Jim Phantom's minimalist drumming, standing as he played, added a visual element that complemented the band's Rockabilly aesthetic. It was hard to believe that all that amazing sound was coming from just three people. It's something that has impressed me from the first time I heard Stray Cats as a kid until now.

The stage setup was simple yet effective, allowing the music to take center stage. The classic logo was featured as the backdrop and a few spray-painted trash cans made up the entire staging. The band's tight performance and effortless cool reminded everyone why The Stray Cats have remained a beloved act for decades. A huge highlight for me, and a song I had really hoped for but did not expect, was another Eddie Cochran cover. Brian Setzer famously portrayed the rock legend in the Richie Valens biopic, "La Bamba". It was exhilarating to hear the Stray Cats cover "Summertime Blues" the song Eddie sang in the film.

The combination of The Midnight Cowgirls and Stray Cats created a dynamic contrast that highlighted the best of both country and rockabilly music. The warmth and energy of the opening act seamlessly transitioned into the high-octane rock 'n' roll that followed. The natural beauty of Red Butte Garden Amphitheater only added to the magic of the night, making it an unforgettable experience for all who attended.

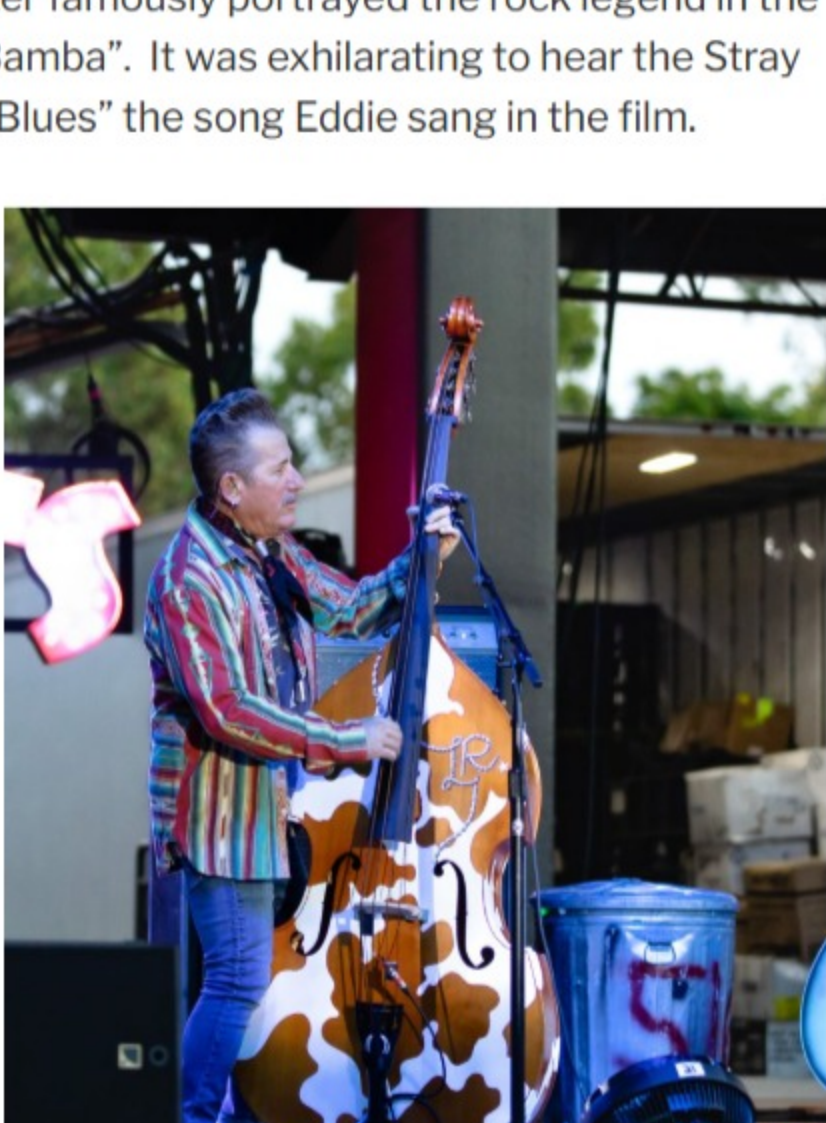


Photo Credit: Kevin Rolfe

As the final notes of "Rock This Town" echoed through the amphitheater, the audience erupted into applause, clearly not ready for the night to end. Stray Cats, ever the showmen, returned for an encore, closing with a fiery rendition of "Rumble in Brighton," leaving the crowd exhilarated and satisfied.

This concert was not just a performance but a celebration of the great musical genre of Rockabilly. While rooted in the past, it continues to resonate with audiences today, Stray Cats and The Midnight Cowgirls delivered an evening that was as unforgettable as it was entertaining, solidifying their places as must-see acts in the live music scene.

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