

Review

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Country Star McBride wows crowd ‘anyway’

By Marie P. Grady

SPRINGFIELD – Martina McBride’s latest cross-over country single is a song called “Anyway.”

It’s a song about taking chances and defying expectations, even if you know you might very well fall flat on your face. So, it may be no small wonder that McBride opened her show at the MassMutual Center Sunday night with this song but ended it with something totally different.

Pat Benatar.

“Hit With Me Your Best Shot,” might be the signature song for McBride’s career as a country singer. The Kansas-born McBride hit the national stage over a decade ago at a time when female country singers were noticed not only for their talents, but their looks.

McBride is among the rare few who has both talent and looks, the kind that can conjure up the inimitable voice and presence of Loretta Lynn in an ankle-length dress singing, “You Ain’t Woman Enough (to Take My Man)” on Nashville’s “Grand Ole Opry.”

And the kind that is Martina these days, dark shoulder length hair framing a model’s blue-eyed face, a lithe entertainer’s body clad in black leather pants, a black cotton and lace waistcoat, and silver, hanging from her neck in layers of braided chains, and dangling off her right hip, in a small cross.

Martina McBride can sing a song about domestic violence called “Independence Day” and make every woman – and every man – in the audience want to shed those chains of brutal history.

And she can also sing, “My Baby Loves Me (Just the Way That I Am.)”

In a 19-song set that included two unconventional encore songs – Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believing” and Benatar’s signature song – she also covered some of the hits that have made her a country star for over a decade, including several tracks from her latest album, “Waking up Laughing.”

The 8,274-seat Mass Mutual Center was not full for this show – seats to the upper left and right of the stage were empty – but McBride, and her opening act, the talented Diamond Rio, could have been playing to the world. But, then, they always have been.

If this show had a major flaw it was that Diamond Rio's extraordinary vocal harmonies were lost in the cavernous MassMutual Center. This is a bluegrass-based band that you want to see and hear up close.

But McBride's 70-minute set – although so slick it seemed almost too polished – was the main act, and her fans were a diverse group. Among them were a woman with a toddler on her hip, pre-teen girls who probably grew up to her anthems of independence, and men, young and old, who were mesmerized by her face and her songs. As McBride raised her right hand high in the air – conjuring her vocal chords to reach the sky on a song called "Where Would You Be" – it was clear this entertainer had the vocal range to match her star billing.