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JT showers the people

Rock legend delights Columbus audience

By **John Carroll**
 Columbus Community News

They came from all over Georgia and elsewhere to see **James Taylor** play in Columbus Saturday night. But mostly they came from Columbus. James Taylor in Columbus. My how times have changed in this once-sleepy river town.

It was an intimate setting for the legendary singer-songwriter and the 1,900 guests who packed the house at the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts. The polite, but responsive crowd listened attentively to every word, lyric and note offered by a warm and personable Taylor, who turns 58 on March 12.

The '70s troubadour did not disappoint his audience. His sense of humor in between songs had grown men and women giggling. His storytelling and multimedia presentation was delivered with confidence and skill. And the music he sang was gripping, inspirational and timeless. His familiar voice was flawless and mesmerizing.

Near the end of the first set as Taylor finished singing and playing the soothing and moving, "You've Got A Friend," the audience rose to its feet



Steamroller:
 Taylor found some friends in Columbus.

See **JT**, page 6

Photo: Jim Dillard

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JT, from page 1

and cheered loudly. As the standing ovation subsided, several zealous fans were heard yelling, "JT! JT!"

POP STAR. For nearly four decades, Taylor has made music that touches the lives of listeners. He's sold more than 35 million albums and won multiple Grammy Awards. In 2000, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Last weekend, the famous musician was in Columbus to perform for the first time ever. Before the show, anticipation and excitement buzzed through the lobby of the RiverCenter. People bought souvenir T-shirts and posters, mingled with each other and talked about the significance of Taylor coming here.

"Five or 10 years ago if someone said James Taylor was coming to Columbus nobody would have believed it," said **Meridith Jarrell**, former chairperson of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. "It's cool to me that he's here. It says a lot."

Enoch Morris, executive director of the RiverCenter, said Taylor is probably the biggest singer to ever perform at the concert hall. The show

WHAT JT PLAYED

Here's a song list from start to finish of Taylor's show in Columbus.

FIRST SET

Something In The Way She Moves
Never Die Young
The Frozen Man
Slap Leather
Country Road
My Traveling Star
You've Got A Friend
Steamroller

SECOND SET

Secret O' Life
Line 'Em Up
Valentine's Day
Chili Dog
Shower The People
Sweet Baby James
Carolina In My Mind

FIRST ENCORE

Fire And Rain
The Nearness of You

SECOND ENCORE

You Can Close Your Eyes



Loyal fans: From left, Mary and Chip Stapleton of Moultrie, Ricky and Patti Smith of Cordele, Patty and Andy Kelley, Kelly Reynolds and Neil Hunter.

sold out in 25 minutes, he said.

"He's right up there at the top, if not the top, for his genre of folk and rock," said Morris. "He's at the top of his game, one of the premier performers that we've been able to attract to the RiverCenter."

A well-connected veteran in the concert business, Morris was the key player in securing Taylor. He knew the musician's booking agent was looking for a place to play in between shows in Charleston, S.C., and Florida. Taylor's "One Man Band" tour is only making eight stops in the Southeast. Columbus got the nod.

STAGE PRESENCE. At 8:15 p.m. the lights dimmed, cheers went up and Taylor entered the stage from the center, emerging from behind the curtain and slinking shyly to his guitar and stool. He waved, smiled, plugged in his guitar and sat down to begin the show. He wore gray jeans, a blue buttoned-down shirt, boots and a blazer.

"Thanks for coming out, ladies and gentlemen," he said.

The stage was decorated very simply with hanging lanterns, a table for his laptop computer, and a piano and keyboard setup. A video screen hung in the background.

After some minor technical adjustments, Taylor ripped straight into his first song, "Something In The Way She Moves." The crowd erupted. It was as if the audience was listening to the first track on his "Greatest Hits" album from 1976.

"I feel fine anytime she's around me now," Taylor crooned in his trademark silky voice. "She's around me now almost all the time, and I feel fine."

Simple lyrics. Twangy guitar licks. Hypnotizing voice. Classic JT. The audience was hooked. He owned them.

His second song was "Never Die Young," an uplifting ditty that ended with the chorus, "Hold them up, hold them up, hold them up."

After the applause died down, Taylor said, "It's not at all the same without you. Nice to be in Columbus." More cheers and laughter from the audience.

Kansas couple takes in JT

By John Carroll

Columbus Community News

Kansas resident **Tim Hoggard** found a sweet surprise in his lunch box last week. Two tickets to the James Taylor concert in Columbus, Ga.

Hoggard's wife, **Brenda**, bought the tickets online and secretly hid them under his turkey sandwich and chips. She included a note that read, "I hope this is the best weekend of your life."

Hoggard's reaction: "Speechless! Overwhelmed!"

The lifelong Taylor fan teaches band and orchestra at an inner-city school in Kansas City. He owns all of Taylor's 17 CDs and has seen the singer-songwriter more than 20 times in concert.

"I grew up with him," said Hoggard, 42, who moonlights in a band when he's not teaching music. "I can play any James Taylor song on guitar."

The Hoggards flew into Atlanta on Saturday morning and drove the 100 miles to Columbus. They pulled up to the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts just as Taylor's entourage of busses rolled into town.

Taylor effectively used his computer and video screen throughout the show to project images and video related to the songs he played. He showed the audience a photo of his father in Antarctica and his mother in North Carolina before he played "The Frozen Man."

He flashed up images of some of his old friends such as Joni Mitchell, Carole King and Danny "Kootch" Kortchmar. And then played "You've Got A Friend."

A prerecorded chorus joined him on the video screen during his performance of "Travelin' Man." He ended the first set by strapping on his electric guitar and playing "Steamroller," while he shimmied across the stage.

During intermission Columbus singer-songwriter **Allen Levi** stood in the lobby and visited with friends.

"He's had a huge, huge influence on me," said Levi, 50. "Anybody growing up in the '70s was a fan of James Taylor. I've seen him several times, but this is the first time without a band. Isn't this tremendous?"



Road trip: Brenda and Tim Hoggard traveled from afar to hear Taylor.

The eager couple greeted Taylor as he emerged from the bus. They chatted with him for 10 minutes and told him that they had seen Taylor's son and daughter perform recently at a bar in Kansas City. They had pictures of The Ben Taylor Band to prove it. The proud father and legendary musician autographed Hoggard's hat.

An hour before Taylor performed to a packed house at the RiverCenter, the Hoggards sat in a party room at the concert hall sipping on beer, munching on food and telling their story to whoever would listen.

"This is worth every penny," said Hoggard. "Expect a priceless concert. Flawless. Impeccable."

The second set was more of the same and just as good. He began with "Secret O' Life" and ended with "Carolina In My Mind." In between, he played hits such as "Sweet Baby James" and "Shower The People."

For an encore, Taylor performed probably his biggest hit ever, "Fire And Rain." He ended the more than two-hour concert with "You Can Close Your Eyes."

POST CONCERT. After the show, many people hung around the lobby soaking in the experience. **Nanci Hendrix**, 49, from West Point, Ga., said she was one of the last people to get tickets when they went on sale a month ago.

"This is a lifelong dream come true for me," beamed Hendrix. "I've never seen him before, but I'm a huge fan."

When Taylor came back on stage after intermission, he spent a few minutes signing autographs for a handful of fans who lingered at the front holding up memorabilia. Seeing this, Hendrix sprang from her seat in the back of the orchestra section, pulled out of her purse a vintage Taylor album, "Mud Slide Slam And The Blue Hori-

zon," that she's had since 1971 and ran down to the front. Taylor signed his name on the front of the album.

"I had to have his autograph," said the school teacher. "This is the pen he touched. I'll never use it again."

BOOMER GROUPIES. **Andy Kelley**, 52, of Columbus said he has seen Taylor four times since 1981, but this was the best yet.

"This was so much more intimate," said Kelley, who made his first trip to the RiverCenter.

Kelley, an investment advisor with Edward Jones, had 10 tickets that he shared with family and business associates.

"We're kind of like groupies," said Kelley, a Jordan High graduate. "I'm more of an old rocker."

After the show, Kelley and friends lingered in the lobby talking about the show. He was envious of the folks who got autographs.

"If I had known that he was going to be so accommodating I would have been right down there with my 'Sweet Baby James' album," said Kelley. "I not only have the album, but the 8-track tape."

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