

Steve Earle shares stories and lots of songs

Written by Richard Amery

Wednesday, 20 June 2012 13:24 -

It is great to see Steve Earle do what he does best— sing.

There wasn't a lot of politics in this show, which he has been known to do and not a lot of movement on stage— just the music as his voice rang through in all its gritted teeth, locked jaw glory.

A full house crammed shoulder to shoulder into the Yates Theatre, June 12 felt the same way.

The mostly older crowd hung on his every word other than a few with their eyes glued to their phones, though he didn't say much. He began with a "sea shanty about oil spills," and barely paused for a breath for the next two hours.

He slouched on stage in a big bushy beard and plaid shirt and jeans, looking like a lumberjack but grinned through his hirsute face as he showed his prowess on a few instruments for a solid couple hours straight beginning with the bouzouki and scowled at the sound man for a bout of screeching mic feedback in the first couple of songs.

Some of his better known hits including "I Ain't Never Satisfied," and "Someday," were among the first one he played in addition to a good one about immigrants. He observed everyone is an immigrant, excluding First Nations.

He covered songs from throughout his career including the big hits like Copperhead Road and "Guitar Town," which came near the end of the set.

He didn't speak much other than to talk briefly about his tour of "places we don't usually get to," and to note his old guitar was ready for the junk heap, though he told a long story about his "gun control" song, "Devil's Right Hand." It began with an observation about being a "peacenik with a trailer full of guns," one of which went missing in the hands of his son, Justin "when I'd just got out of jail and my ex-wife left me an out of control teenager."

"You don't do your best parenting when your four and a half months clean," he commented adding he and his brother ended up wrestling Justin into a truck and took him to a wilderness camp," which lead to Justin calling a day later and confessing he stole the gun.

That lead to the rest of the story about the song being the only one he recorded three times, for his original album in the mid '70s, again for Copperhead Road and '70s version for the movie Brokeback Mountain.

He switched to mandolin for a couple Celtic inspired songs including my absolute favourite "Galway Girl," which was worth the price of admission alone for me.

Earle also played a song "I wrote when I was 19 , which is exactly the type of song you write when you're 19," then followed it up with a brand new song — a beautifully fingerpicked acoustic number reflecting on the subject of aging "which is the type of song you write when you're 56."

He played a couple brand new never recorded songs.

Though he didn't do much on stage other than to march in place with his music, he is still a captivating performer with a strong, resonant raspy, gravel fuelled voice.

Another highlight was an older song "Billy Austin," a touching tale about a forgotten inmate on death row who called the police after killing a man and getting sentenced to death for it.

He ended with the big hit "Copperhead Road" but was called back for an encore which included "Guitar Town," after which he thanked the audience for "being Canadian."

— *By Richard Amery, L.A Beat Editor*