

Suzie McNeil and The Chain Reaction deliver masterful Motown medleys and dynamic pop standards at Town Park



Canadian pop singer-rocker Suzie McNeil—backed by seven-piece ensemble The Chain Reaction—treated Town Park attendees to a dynamic performance on Wednesday night.

McNeil's vocal versatility and Chain Reaction's virtuosity were featured in the latest installment of Aurora's popular Concert in the Park series and attracted over a thousand music fans to the stately setting.

McNeil—resplendent in magenta hair, white-framed sunglasses, a black and white patterned mini-skirt/vest ensemble, and white go-go boots—engaged an appreciative audience on an ideal August evening with new arrangements of her best-selling songs, a few rock anthems, a series of Motown medleys, and some throbbing disco standards that inspired the denizens of the dance floor.

McNeil's showmanship was evident as she worked the crowd expertly all evening. She even suggested that she "might move to Aurora with its nice houses, nice people, and nice parks" and made mention prior to the performance about Aurora's "cool Mayor."

The veteran songstress—whose song "Believe" served as the official anthem of the Canadian team for the 2010 Olympics—moved fluidly through the first set, highlighted by a soulful and jazzy delivery of The Tragically Hip's "Bobcaygeon", which included a great sax solo by Alison Young whose on-stage chemistry with the magnetic lead singer was evident all evening.

Securing McNeil was a bit of good fortune for the Town of Aurora since she will be on stage with Aerosmith on their "Peace Out" farewell tour. McNeil was part of Aerosmith's Vegas residency show.

The second set cover of Aerosmith's "Cryin'" acknowledged her connection to the classic rockers from Boston and showcased the musical chops of husband-wife team Andrew McTaggart and McNeil through their soaring lead guitar work and vocals, respectively.

The dynamic duo made this song a highlight of the second set, and showed McTaggart and McNeil in perfect on-stage harmony.

McNeil and Chain Reaction moved seamlessly through a Motown medley—including The Temptations' "Get Ready", The Spinners' "Making My Way Back to You", and The Jackson Five's "I'll Be There"—that filled the Town Park dance floor and closed the first set with positive energy that swept through the leafy venue.

McNeil opened her second set with Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive." The 1970s mirror ball standard re-filled the dance floor with

dozens of disco-philes. She played to her audience and extended Gaynor's piece to establish a natural bridge to her pop roots with "I Want to Know." McNeil bobbed and weaved her way through Stevie Wonder's "Sir Duke" and George Michael's "Faith" with the requisite regard and range for these popular pieces.

A wonderfully-human moment in the concert occurred when McNeil had to dash off stage to retrieve her misplaced harmonicas—a regular occurrence, she admitted to the crowd—and The Chain Reaction covered ably during the ebullient lead singer's "exit stage left" by extending their introduction to Dusty Springfield's classic "Son of a Preacher Man" with engaging individual performances.

The dance floor re-filled and the good times rolled on under a setting sun.

The second set could have ended with the climactic delivery of The Jackson 5's classic "I Want You Back", but McNeil used an extended version of Tina Turner's "Proud Mary" to introduce all the musicians that comprise The Chain Reaction.

It was evident that the crowd assembled at Town Park on Wednesday night would definitely "Want Suzie McNeil Back" after the go-go-booted, high energy lead singer sent over a thousand concert-goers home in a buoyant mid-summer mood.

Kayla Kushnir, runner-up in the 2023 Aurora's Teen Idol contest, delivered a spirited rendition of the national anthem to kick off the festivities on Wednesday night at Town Park.

By Jim Stewart