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Fort Bragg's Big Blast Celebration sings of freedom

- Wynonna Judd gives the packed Main Post Parade Field her full arsenal of country, gospel, blues and soul.

By Josh Harrell

Staff writer

At a packed Fourth of July celebration, Wynonna Judd brought her legendary voice to Fort Bragg to perform in front of 45,000 people that crammed on to the base's Main Post Parade Field on Friday.

The country music singer highlighted the day's entertainment with a full repertoire of her past — from country to gospel, from soul to blues.

Fort Bragg's Operation Celebrate Freedom featured two acts along with Wynonna, country music performers Dakota Rain and Rockie Lynne, as well as a parachute demonstration by the Golden Knights before the night's fireworks finale.

By the time Wynonna finished, the field was packed with spectators, from the main stage to the carnival rides on the opposite end.

Sean Thompson is stationed at Fort Bragg, and his parents came from Fort Myers, Fla., to visit him and his family.

"Wynonna's going to be great. I know my parents are really excited about her," he said of the couple that had given Thompson a break by taking his kids to the carnival rides.

Wynonna brought a full arsenal of musical styles to the stage with her. She performed from her own solo work with the song "Rock Bottom." She sang such gospel songs as "I Could Only Imagine" and rock and soul songs such as "I Want To Know What Love Is" and "Love Has Come Around." But what might have been the crowd's favorite was "Grandpa," a song sung famously by Wynonna and her mother as the group The Judds.

"I'm proud of where I come from," she said while talking to the crowd about her roots with her mother.

Wynonna played her acoustic guitar as she sang the classic country song. She let the crowd finish the lyrics for her as she stepped away from the microphone and smiled.

Wynonna was happy to converse with the crowd, noting she wanted to form a relationship with them, she "didn't want it to be like an HBO Special." She talked about her own history and thanked the fans that had been with her for more than 20 years.

Terina Armstrong of Fayetteville was one of those loyal fans. She and her mother went to see The Judds multiple times when the duo still was together.

"I've been hearing a lot of her stuff on the radio here and there," Armstrong said. "I'm interested in seeing what she sounds like by herself."

Todd Harris, who has been stationed at Fort Bragg for the past three years, says his wife got him out to the Parade Field, because she is a big fan of Wynonna.

"She says she didn't drag me out here, but she definitely did," Harris said.

Country singer and native North Carolinian Rockie Lynne opened for Wynonna. He was stationed at Fort Bragg in the 1980s and spoke during his performance of the honor of returning to the post to perform. Lynne auctioned off one of his guitars to raise money for his organization Tribute to the Troops, which provides education money for children of war victims.

He closed with a series of patriotic songs and finally with a rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner" that had everyone standing.

"Having Rockie, a former 82nd member, and a national act like Wynonna is great for these troops," said Rhett Stroupe, chief special events coordinator for Fort Bragg MWR. "It can really serve as an escape from the day to day stresses."

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Staff photos pages 1B and 4B by Stephanie Bruce

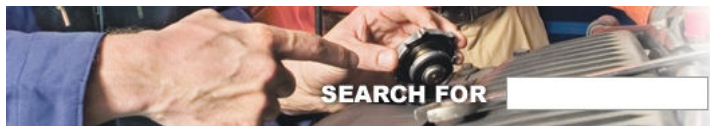
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