

Music review: Lyle Lovett lives large at Maryhill



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There's no getting around the fact that it's a haul from Portland to the lovely Maryhill Winery in Goldendale, Wash., where a stately amphitheatre sits on the edge of a golden grass hill overlooking the Columbia River east of The Dalles. Lyle Lovett is one artist who makes the 230-mile round trip worth it.

Kicking open the show was the energetic Jace Everett, a bluesy rock singer with a muscular voice best known for the HBO "True Blood" theme song "Bad Things." Hopefully, that exposure and several dates opening for Lovett will encourage people to seek out more of his music.

As is Lovett's style, he and about half of his suit-clad Large Band took the stage with a low key walk-on, and built up the musical intensity until the show climaxed in a full-scale gospel throwdown. The solid "Black & Blue" led to the well-known "Tumblin' Tumbleweed" and two-step "Cowboy Man." A few more numbers and many bottles of Maryhill vintage later, the three-quarter capacity crowd was on its feet swinging and singing to "(That's Right) You're Not From Texas" and swept up in the forlorn passion of 2009's "Natural Forces" -- a song which includes a line that makes it a candidate for the best cowboy ballad ever: "Home is where my horse is."

Sixteen players and singers eventually crowded the Maryhill stage like a family reunion, providing a warm backdrop for Lovett's charismatic, emotional voice. Lovett himself has always been an odd-looking character with his lopsided grin, curly pompadour and stoic, stand-and-deliver performances; there is no denying, however, the deep joy and humor of

“Church,” the abandonment to the unpredictability of love in the pop-infused “You Can’t Resist It,” or the moody defiance of “If I Had A Boat.” The show’s only disappointment was the exclusion of a few usually show-stopping Lovett numbers like “She’s No Lady” and “M-O-N-E-Y”.

While these days his music is defined as Americana, the fact is that Lovett has never met a style of music he didn’t master; it’s been said that’s the main reason he never achieved the kind of mainstream super-stardom his talent deserves. There are, however, many upsides to that outcome, one of which is being able to appreciate an amazing vintage musician like Lovett at a beautiful winery in the Gorge, rather than squeezed into a plastic seat at the Rose Garden.