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Review: Ken Peltier and band have national potential

By Sarah Henning
Anchorage Daily News

Let's get one thing straight.

I'm about to give some high praise to [Ken Peltier](#), leader of the Alaska band that opened for Little Big Town at Sullivan Arena Tuesday night.

But I want to be clear: Ken Peltier isn't just "good for a local." He's good, period.

A Wrangler-wearing traditionalist in the George Strait/Chris LeDoux vein, it wouldn't be surprising if Peltier rode to the gig on a horse named Trigger and ate a post-show dinner of beans out of a can.

Peltier's greatest asset is his voice, which is as deep and liquid as oil at the bottom of a well.

Instead of forcing his originals on an arena crowd, Peltier made a smart choice and stuck largely to beloved cover songs guaranteed to rev up a crowd. But his well-executed covers served a dual purpose: They showed Peltier can hang with the big boys. Trace Adkins, Keith Urban, even Merle Haggard songs came off as polished, lively and sincere.

His band delivered, too, both technically and with stage vigor. It was great to hear that keening steel guitar, a sadly underused instrument in country music nowadays. It was also awesome to see Bonnie Thayer on bass, since Alaska's country, rock and pop bands are severely lacking gender equality.

Unfortunately, there were some technical issues that occasionally distorted the sound, especially Peltier's vocals. And the band's arrangement of "Amazing Grace" missed the mark. Although the percussion-dominant version gets points for being daring, the other instrumentation felt aimless. The overall effect failed to convey the song's bittersweet nature.

I'm guessing many of those in the crowd would say the



Ken Peltier at the Sullivan Arena Tuesday. Photo by Marc Lester.

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Peltier set highlight was the sing-a-long of "Ghost Riders in the Sky," a fun three minutes during which Peltier threw in some Johnny Cash vibrato and managed not to bottom out on the low notes.

But in my mind, "Educated Man" was the moment where the band shone brightest. The poignant but not overly sentimental story-song, written by Hobo Jim, stands up to work by Kris Kristofferson and Emmylou Harris. Execution wise, just put some old family video to it and it's a CMT hit.

It must be hard to get the attention of the suits on Music Row when you're from the Valley. But hopefully, Peltier will keep trying.

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