

# The gospel truth: Oaks have energy

## REVIEW

By Heather Persson  
of The StarPhoenix

Ask the average person on the street what they know about the Oak Ridge Boys, and it will likely come down to one line: "Giddy up oom poppa omm poppa mow mow."

The section of the verse from their '80s hit *Elvira* sticks in almost anyone's head and must be considered a key to the group's success over the years.

But besides getting an opportunity to sing along with this catchy and somewhat silly lyric, why would anybody show up to see this far-from-young quartet at TCU Place on a Monday night?

In a word: Harmony.

Before there were Rascal Flatts and Emerson Drive, country music had the Oak Ridge Boys. And the industry has had them for a long, long time. The original group, the Oak Ridge Quartet, formed during the Second World War. The current lineup includes three members who were around for the heyday of the '70s and '80s: Joe Bonsall (tenor), William Lee Golden (baritone and the guy with the long beard) and Duane Allen (lead). Relative newcomer Richard Sterban adds the bass voice.

Bonsall is quoted as saying: "We're just an old gospel group with a rock 'n' roll band playing country music." That about covers it.

Besides *Elvira*, hits such as *Sail Away*, *Dream On*, *American Made*, *Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Day-*

*light* and *Bobbie Sue* made the group famous. But it is its deep gospel roots that are feeding its longevity.

Although many of the songs they performed in Saskatoon were not inspirational — one set during Monday night's performance featured religious songs — almost every tune follows the traditional gospel formula. Starting with a highly honed four-part blend of voices, solos highlighting the range of the particular singer are thrown in. This is followed by at least one key change to build momentum and a huge, harmonious vocal finale. This recipe is used because it works, and the Oak Ridge Boys have it down to a science.

For guys who have been on stage for more than 30 years, the "Oaks" still show a remarkable amount of energy. This is especially true of Bonsall, who jumps around the stage like an older version of Brad Paisley. High-quality staging, and a light show reminiscent of that offered by Elton John last year, added to the wattage of the performance.

The crowd, almost filling the third balcony, were often heard singing along to the familiar songs. They were anxious to get the band on stage, clapping in unison to call them on stage when the break after the opening act seemed to last too long.

A nod must go to Rose Valley's own Codie Prevost, who warmed up the audience. His song, *Let To Be Said For Leaving*, effectively and emotionally told the story of how he told his dad he was leaving the family farm to pursue music.

hpersson@tp.comnet.com