

Johnson a hit with Canty children

JO GILBERT - The Press
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Photo: KIRK HARGREAVES/The Press

FREE WHEELING: Rhiannon Williams, 7, was one of the children presented with a helmet and a bike by musician Jack Johnson as part of a Variety charity programme.

American singer Jack Johnson has brought smiles and new wheels to Canterbury children.

In Christchurch for a concert last night, the Hawaiian took time out to help give new bikes to 50 Christchurch and Kaiapoi youngsters in Cathedral Square.

The bikes were donated by children's charity Variety as part of the nationwide Bike for Kids tour, marking the charity's 21st anniversary.

Johnson said he became involved after he heard about what the region had been through after the September 4 earthquake.

"I know things have been a little rough since the earthquake, and the children will surely enjoy the freedom they can get on a bike," he said.

"Bike riding is also great for the environment, rather than riding in cars."

Johnson's star status was not the big drawcard for many of the children, but the bikes proved a hit.

"When I found out [I was getting a bike] this morning, I was so excited," said Sharna Williams, 7, of Aranui Primary School.

"I was jumping up and down and saying 'Yes, yes, yes!'"

The youngsters had been nominated for the bikes by their parents or teachers because they were role models or had overcome adversity.

BMX rider Daniel Franks and What Now children's television show presenter Gem Knight also helped hand out the bikes.

Johnson delivers to campfire crowd

With Jack Johnson, you don't so much feel as if you're at a concert, but more that you're sitting around a campfire listening to a friend play the guitar and sing while you sup on a cool drink.

Johnson's concerts have that laid-back, casual approach.

Johnson is a master at relaxing his audience.

It was the same last night on the Christchurch leg of his To The Sea tour.

No pyrotechnics, no fancy gimmicks - just Johnson, his guitar, his band and his soulful tunes that make you want to grab your surfboard and hit the waves (if you had a surfboard, that is).

Johnson opened with a collection of older songs, such as Taylor and Sitting, Waiting, Wishing that had the audience whooping and hollering before launching into some songs from his new album, To The Sea.

The area in front of the stage got more crowded as the concert went on.

Johnson knows how to work a crowd - a mix of young and old, families and couples - who joined in enthusiastically during some of his more well-known songs.

His rendition of the Steve Miller Band's The Joker got huge applause from the crowd.

However, some of the loudest cheers came when Johnson's keyboard player took over vocals during one song.

Johnson last night succeeded in creating a beach-party atmosphere at the arena.

He is welcome to play at my campsite anytime.

The opening act, Canadian duo Tegan and Sara, did an excellent job of warming up the crowd with a collection of fast-paced rock tunes and slower ballads.

The young Canadians might have been the support act, but they are a duo to watch.

REVIEW Jack Johnson in concert, CBS Canterbury Arena, Tuesday, November 30, 7.30pm. Reviewed by Gerard Campbell.

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