

# Missouri brothers win Southwest Regional Country Showdown at the Shuler Theater

By Tim Keller – For the Comet | Posted: Friday, October 24, 2014 5:00 am

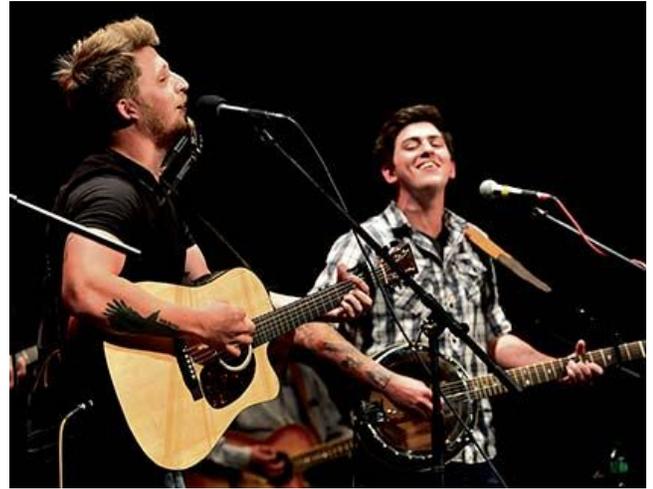
RATON – The Southwest Regional Country Showdown at the Shuler Theater Saturday night pitted seven state champions in a talent contest to send the southwest’s best new country act to Nashville for a national final and the chance to beat four other regions’ winners for the \$100,000 grand prize. In the end—and they were the last act to perform—The Brothers Roberson of Springfield, Missouri, swept the contest with their infectious feel-good camaraderie and accomplished performance skills.

It could have crashed for them. Older brother Rhett Roberson’s mic stand was faulty from the start, threatening to slide down in mid-performance. Instead of growing flustered as the stage crew worked on the problem, the Roberson brothers turned it into an endearing comedy act. When they finally launched into their two-song mini-set, they just kept smiling, having so much fun that the audience couldn’t resist smiling with them. Rhett segued from the mic stand fiasco to the first song by saying, “We’re from Missouri. This is a song about loving a girl in Dallas. It’s called ‘Blame Oklahoma.’”

Many veteran professional entertainers need at least two songs on stage to hit their stride and reach a level of comfort and confidence that allows the audience to enjoy their show. The Country Showdown requires young talents to step into a high-pressure environment and give all they’ve got within just two songs. Then they have to get off. It’s a tribute to the young talent at the Southwest Regionals, held at the Shuler Theater for the last four years, that they’ve been so impressive within the confines of just two songs.

Rhett Roberson played his Martin guitar and sang lead on songs he’d written while younger brother Brendan accompanied him on a clear-top banjo and harmony vocals. They seemed to have so much fun doing it that they couldn’t keep from breaking into infectious smiles. They often leaned close to each other as if sharing secrets, and the secrets appeared to be fun.

The Country Showdown is “America’s Number One Country Music Talent Search,” and its goal is to find



The Brothers Roberson, Rhett (left) and Brendan (right)

The Brothers Roberson of Missouri used their energy and musicianship to please the audience and judges and win a trip to the national finals in Nashville.

the most marketable new talent in the country. Songwriting is a tiny part of it—only 6% of the scoring—with judges looking for a whole package of musicianship, great voice and singing, and even greater stage presence and audience appeal. Last year at the Shuler, the judges succeeded in choosing an act that went on to win the \$100,000 national prize at Nashville’s Ryman Auditorium. That act, Crystal Yates, released her first album last week and on Saturday night she was far away, opening a concert for Martina McBride.

McBride, herself, competed in the 1983 Country Showdown national final; she didn’t win. Neither did Neal McCoy that year. Emcee Dave Phillips said from the Shuler stage Saturday night, “70% of the acts in country music today have participated at one time or another in Country Showdown.” The long list includes Garth Brooks, Miranda Lambert, Jason Aldean, Tim McGraw, Toby Keith, Tracy Lawrence, Mark Chesnutt, Sara Evans, Brad Paisley, Billy Ray Cyrus, Tracy Byrd, Billy Dean, and Sweethearts of the Rodeo.

Saturday night’s judges were Raton’s Stan Lark and John Ward, along with Nick Branchal of Taos. All three are lifelong musicians and veteran professional entertainers.

The other performers were Matt Coleman representing Kansas, Tyler Hammond from North Texas, Ashley Pierce from South Texas, Jana Lee Cox from Oklahoma, Keeira Lyn Ford from Arizona, and Katey Laurel from Colorado. Local favorites Colfax Reunion opened and closed the show; they also accompanied several of the competing singers.

As the judges tabulated their scores, all seven of the competing acts joined together on stage, accompanied by Colfax Reunion, to sing “Wagon Wheel” together. The audience loved it. Then The Brothers Roberson were crowned the winner, and the audience seemed to love that, too.