

THE HEARTLAND FESTIVAL

ALAMEDA ISLAND

JUNE 11, 2005



SUMMERTIME, WHEN THE LIVING IS EASY

Contrary to popular belief neither Janis Joplin nor any member of her band composed "Summertime". It was originally a George Gershwin tune. The lady known as "The Pearl" nevertheless owns that tune in a special way.

And this weekend, the summer began in earnest here in the Bay Area under gorgeously clear skies with events popping off all over the place, Friday evening, things kicked off with Open Studios celebrations in the East Bay and with the rich Black and White Ball in Babylon where the Nabobs of Nob Hill

snobbed and supped between lavish layouts bordered by black and white balloons and twisted crepe streamers and providing at least a decent living to a few hard working bands and an army of black and white attired servants.

You can read about the who's who and who's there in the social columns. This is not a social column so go away if that is what you want.

The vast majority of human beings cannot afford such pretense and so the younger sort could be found at the annual BFD, hosted by Live 105 this year at the Shoreline on Saturday and headlining Social Distortion and Sleater-Kinney.

Here on the Island we had our own Heartland Music Festival, kicking off at 11:00 and lasting through 7:00 PM with quite an enviable array of bands.

The festival, organized by the Rosenblum family and Peter of McGraths, was a benefit organized in support of the Music in the Schools Program. Peter has long held a passion for music; even the McGraths Pub is run largely as a function of his desire to provide a venue for qualified musicians to play, for the venue has never earned a profit and is not designed to ever do so. It is entirely a musician's paradise and a local gem.



As for the Festival, these sorts of things where talented people volunteer their time are absolute magnets for people who want to get in up close and watch top-notch bands

Take, for example, Tom Rigney and his Flambeau, which rocked the place with such extraordinary energy we were all amazed that people did not hop in the water and swim over the water from Babylon. That Rigney can really play the fiddle and make it cry or sing.



Another advantage to such affairs is that since so many are offering their time gratis as part of the benefit, the musicians tend to find the space where they

really enjoy what they are doing and smiles are the order for the day, as evinced by the broad beam by the barrelhouse piano player Caroline Dahlia.



In our opinion, Rigney conducted an incendiary set worthy of any auditorium of some ten thousand more people with gusto, with style and with verve, characteristically jumping from the stage to sashay through the audience in the middle of a song.



After the Cajun sounds of Louisiana, we then were treated to the Chicago blues with Ron Thompson, complete in porkpie hat and all the trimmings.



Please note that both he and the bassist wear the green entry bracelets for the front gate. That means that not only have they volunteered their time to benefit the schools but they paid front gate admission to enter the grounds instead of entering through the "Employees Only Entrance."

Somewhat jarring against the energy of the preceding bands was the sound of an "old time dance band" which was placed in unfortunate juxtaposition to two high energy urban sound rock bands.

The booking decision caused the energy to flag significantly.

Which is unfortunate for these guys had traveled across the country to perform with earnest intensity their honest version of mountain bluegrass.



Houston Jones finished off the day and as Peter mentioned, many had come entirely to hear this one band, which appears on the rising star circuit.

Their set was plagued by sound problems due to loaned and inadequate equipment. HJ is quite an irrepressible band and it would take an earthquake, fire, flood and total electrical outage to set them halfway back. And in such circumstances, we feel they would still rock the house



HJ is powered by Travis Jones and Glen "Houston " Pomianek performs "high octane Americana", or what is increasingly these days being referred to as "roots music", in that they borrow heavily from the American Pop Songbook as it has developed over the years with a country-western twang to it but still possessed of rebellious ducktail rock 'n roll.

Houston typically parks himself on the periphery, calmly pulling enormously difficult extended phrases from his upside-down stringed guitars in the role of lead like the shy genius nerd at the high school dance reinventing the calculus by himself at a back table.



Travis is the pistol of the group, doing the vocals and rhythm guitar, cracking bawdy jokes and generally keeping these unruly gangsters in line with an infectious zest for life



Rounding out the front line is the multi-instrumentalist Wayne "Chojo" Jacques who, as with all members of the band, has contributed original material to their increasingly impressive repertoire down-on-their-luck drifters, condemned prisoners, long-ago lovers remembered in a found arcade booth photograph and Jehovah Witness strippers.



Everyone at the Festival, especially the performers, had a great time enjoying themselves and a fine time was had by all.

Also happening this weekend was the annual Haight Street Faire in Babylon and a union protest up in Berkeley where the usual gang of riot squad armed with baton and tear gas was not needed -- for the Boys in Blue were themselves walking the line this time.

Had a confab with our next door Buddy, Mike, who said, "Man that was the first time I ever been to a demonstration; usually I am on the Other Side!"

At issue was the Governor's recent threat to break all the major public unions in the State by cutting pension benefits and coming down hard on grade school teachers.

Oh such a big, strong Terminator Guy. No "girly man" he, to beat up a group of grade school teachers.