

FESTIVAL REVIEW

by Pat Kramer

The 23rd Annual CAJUN & BLUES MUSIC FESTIVAL

Rancho Santa Susana Park,
Simi Valley, CA
May 26-27, 2012

Two days of sunshine and perfect weather greeted blues fans for the 23rd Annual Cajun & Blues Music Festival in Simi Valley over Memorial Day weekend with Delta Groove Music's Randy Chortkoff booking the incredible line up of Blues talent.

The Blues stage was one of three stages at the festival; a Cajun stage and a Kid's Performance stage provided old and new music while New Orleans caterers cooked up alligator, crawfish and other tasty delicacies.

Saturday, in particular, was an exciting day for blues fans. The day opened with emcee Bubba Jackson of KJAZ introducing solo artist Paul Osher, former sideman for Muddy Waters and Otis Span simultaneously playing one-handed piano, guitar and bass harmonica during his set. Harp player R.J. Mischo followed with guitarist Rick Holmstrom showing his range by blending jazz, cajun and blues influences into his sound with a great rendition of elder statesman James Cotton's "The Hucklebuck." He was followed by 2012 Blues Music Award's "Best Horn Player of the Year," Terry Hanck, with his 'greasy soul-rock-in' blues' off his Delta Groove release.

After that, the show took it up a couple of notches during The Mannish Boys' set when surprise guest guitarists Benois King and Smokin' Joe Kubek joined the band trading licks with Kirk Fletcher and Kid Ramos. In addition to Randy Chortkoff's harp work, Rod Piazza, Marco Bandolfi, and Big Pete joined him, while Finis Tasby, Jackie Payne, and Janiva Magness shared vocals. Drummer Jimi Bott, bassist Willie J. Campbell, and sax player Ron Dziubla and trumpet player Lee Thornburg rounded out the band for a scintillating, white-hot set.

Headlining the day was the Tribute to Muddy Waters featuring an exceptional line up of artists including James

Cotton on harp, Bob Margolin on slide guitar and on vocals, Mud Morganfield, resurrecting his old man's sound and image, spot-on. Bill Stuve, Bob Corritore, Rob Rio and Daryl Nulisch filled out the band which dedicated its show to the living legends, here and those who have passed on, a fitting tribute to Memorial Day weekend.

Ending the day was Nathan James and The Rhythm Scratchers with James Harmon on vocals, for a perfect day of the Blues.

Sunday's show was equally impressive with a blistering set by Texas Blues guitarist Shawn Pittman and an exciting reunion of Rod Piazza & The Mighty Flyer's as former band members Junior Watson, Jimi Bott, and "Bill" Willie Schwartz all performed with the band.

Harp player Big Pete's set was accentuated by the addition of guitarists Alex Schultz and Paul Size, and Hollywood Blue Flames' on harp Al Blake and B-3 player Fred Kaplan on the B-3.

The Fabulous Thunderbirds were Sunday's headliner and gave fans a powerhouse set followed by vocalist Candye Kane and guitarist Laura Chavez, who performed an inspired act that kept many people hanging out till the very end. This was Candye's first show since kicking cancer's a--- and she clearly had a big following by the number of fans lined up to buy her latest CD, "Sister Vagabond."

The Might Mojo Prophets opened the day followed by Mitch Kashmar with an assortment of guest artists, guitarist John Marx and singer Adrianna Marie.

While everyone enjoyed the variety of music, the day was also about giving back as The Blues Foundation's Executive Director Jay Sieleman noted when he described their efforts to Raise the Roof! in building a \$3.5 million Blues Hall of Fame in Memphis. Contributions are needed now and one way to give is by contributed \$10.00 by texting the word "Blues" to "80077." When completed, The Blues Hall of Fame will tell the history of the Blues creating a valuable destination and a legacy the Blues' History.

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