Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival



C.J. Chenier performed to a sold-out Market at Bourbon Street at the Boyce. Getting more popular every year the Bourbon Street show has quickly become an staple of the festival.



Sandra Wright, who played second at the Women in Blues show left no doubt that she was the true headliner of the event. She displayed an amazing voice which was matched only by her rapport with the audience.



Luther (Guitar Jr.) Johnson's Chicago style blues created an atmosphere of pure entertainment. He seemed to enjoy himself as he enticed the crowd onto the dancefloor which was crammed with fans soaking up the ~~suds~~ show.

A Festival Diary...

Wednesday, September 13th.

From Halifax, Nova Scotia to Fredericton New Brunswick, the a capella singing group Four The Moment arrived only moments before they appeared on Wednesday night at the tent.

Getting their initial inspiration from the Washington D.C. based women's singing group Sweet Honey in a Rock, Four the Moment formed in 1981 when they got together for a one time benefit concert in a union which was thought to be temporary and just "for the moment". Their music fuses reggae, gospel, blues and folk harmonies in order to create a sound all their own. Much of this sound focuses on the experiences, both past and present, of Nova Scotia's black community. Songs like Africville which tells the tale of the forced move of Nova Scotia's black community help to keep the history of Nova Scotia alive.

They also tackle the issues of the struggles of the Third World and women in songs like Black Mother/Black Daughter which became the title track of an NFB film. They have appeared across the country taking the stage in Ottawa, Toronto, Regina, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Delvina Bernard made turning the human voice into an instrument look easy when she asked for a chair so that she might play her instrument. Taking the seat she began to not only play the air base but vocalised the sounds as well.

Thursday, September 14th.

Imagine a group of people sitting on a dance floor while up on the stage some of the best blues music in the Maritimes is being played. While this may seem hard to imagine this is precisely how the Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival's Women in Blues show started out.

Leading out the evening was Mary Stewart who appeared as part of Southside Shuffle. This band from Saint John served up blues New Brunswick style and the crowd ate up their performance as if it were candy. Mary Stewart managed to draw the undivided attention of the crowd which began the evening unusually sedate. While she crooned them into an amazing mood, the audience sat and enjoyed the feeling of community.

Next out was Sandra Wright Band. Hailing from Memphis, Tennessee, Sandra Wright was the hit of the evening and the gem of the festival. The Sandra Wright Band vamped its way through the best set of the evening. Actually, it was just Sandra Wright herself who did the vamping, but she was more than capable of handling this job on her own. Sandra spent most of the time between numbers alternately slamming the men in the audience and flirting with them in an overt sexual fashion.

However, it should never be thought that Sandra Wright is just a vamp. She also has one of the most powerful voices the burg called Fredericton is ever likely to hear. Early in her very first song she growled out a long wail that had the entire crowd looking at each other and gasping "WOW! What a set of pipes she's got!" She was able to modify this voice when the need arised, however, softening it to play the female voice and leaving it hard to play the male voice in her frog blues, "I've got the Greens."

Following Sandra Wright's encore Theresa Malenfant took to the stage with a scowl firmly etched upon her face as she had just been blown off the stage by the Sandra Wright band. While no one can deny that Theresa Malenfant has amazing talent, she was just plainly outclassed by a phenomenal band. Combining some of their old standard set with a new repertoire of Janis Joplin tunes the band gave one of the best performances which I have witnessed.

However, Theresa's group tried continually to convince the audience that they were up against technical forces of evil which were intent upon making them look bad. To top it off the band tried to end their set early and when they were held to their contract they complained; telling the audience that "if you ever form a band never work for this festival". This is odd behaviour for a band which only began to gain notoriety five years ago, after having appeared at the first Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival.

The fans persevered undaunted by the complaints of the band clapping politely, showing just why this festival has become such a success. They were appreciative of the music, the evening and the talent, and didn't let the attitude of the lesser of the three bands bother them.

The Michael George Quintet put on a funky jazz show on Thursday at the Blues Tent. The lead singer has a deep, sonorous voice – very groovy. The Quintet did a few instrumental numbers that made me chair-dance (well, picnic table dance). At this point, I started drinking, but I know I enjoyed the music.

Friday, September 15th.

Big City Blues were undoubtedly the sleeper hit of the blues side of this year's festival. This three piece band from Halifax was so unheralded that their names did not even appear on the festival programs or schedules.

Big City Blues owes far more to the rockin' blues styles of dead people like Stevie Ray Vaughn and Jimi Hendrix than to other blues legends. Their playing is loud and aggressive, not to mention seriously uncompromising. Nevertheless, they are far from being a band that just rocks all night through a series of good tunes without managing to generate any emotion with their performance.