

Fear and Loathing On Day Two

Memo to: Alastair Johnstone, Entertainment desk
From: Gordon Thomas, at Large: Presumed still Jamming with the bands in an undisclosed warehouse.

Al: Sorry, the following may appear as the ramblings of a burnt out hack in a Blue-smoke illusion. I assure you I am well, but still recovering. The assignment taxed what little focus and energy remain.

The most troubling aspect of a day two review is determining when day one ended and day two began... or for that matter when day three started. Day five I'm quite sure ended during the daylight hours of Monday. Al, it was an overwhelming party, the kind talked about in hushed tones by blues wannabees like myself for decades. Thanks for the press pass. As I remember it, and Lucifer knows the cranial neurons assigned to memory bailed out early Wednesday night at a festival warmup with Newfoundland's Roger House at the Dock, day two began in a rum bottle haze on my couch.

Roger, by the way, is a blues guitarman extraordinaire. A scorcher with that elusive subtle touch seldom witnessed in the smoky beer halls of these environs.

Anyway Al, that I was on my couch at all came as a bit of a shock. I checked myself thoroughly. All limbs in tact. Eyes bleeding. No car in the driveway. Good news there. Nobody got stupid.

Thursday night, the first "Official" evening of heavy partying at the Harvest Jazz and Blues, had been a sordid, adrenaline-packed debauch downtown that only barely escaped the notice of local liquor inspectors and Freddy Beach's finest.

Great shows by Joe Murphy, Peterborough's Jackson Delta, Roger Howse (Yes, I was drawn back one more time) and that British blowhard Long John Baldry. Despite my reservations, I actually got off on old Long John. He's quite a showman. There was a fair amount of concern around our table that the festival had failed to sign up Cuervo Gold as a sponsor, if they tried at all.

But Friday morning, prostrate, alone, red and wrinkled on the couch, my priorities quickly switched to signing rolaids and Tylenol to the festival

marquis. I was out of both, and paying the price.

I spent most of the day in recovery. My colleagues and I began Friday as assigned at the Blues (read Beer) Garden Tent, a laudable addition to the festival I might add...and well received by fellow members of the fifth estate.

Much to my surprise, the beer tent had no suds. It was a family event.

No matter; I needed the bread. And it warmed my heart to witness all those youngsters transported into a blues

ist John Clayton and drummer Wayne Blanchard.

Drinks flowed. The place was packed. And everyone got their five bucks worth and more from the British Blues Legend. I could never figure out why they called him a legend. Sure the Beatles opened for him. Sure he lent Elton John his name.

Sure he hung out with the Stones.

Didn't we all? But... Let's face it. I thought his show at the Social Club last year was less than lack lustre. But maybe that's what

singer.

I didn't see Tony George, owner of Tony's Music Box, open for Rane. But by all reports he, too was amazing. Right here in our own backyard. Imagine that. Maybe the Sheraton or some nice place like that should give local bands like Tony's, Jazz configuration and the Cosmic Quartet) a regular gig.

Only about 350 in the Playhouse Friday night. Too bad. For only 15 bucks, you got two great bands in a wonderful venue. In Toronto or Mon-

treal, you could easily pay \$40 a ticket for a show like that. I guess it's going to take a few years of Harvest Jazz and Blues to develop a larger Jazz audience in town.

After Rane Lee, there seemed only one place to go: The River Room. After all, it was only across the street.

Now, Al, I like the River Room during the Jazz and Blues. You have to love this crummy little bar that doesn't do shit for business 51 weeks a year. Then, along comes the festival and the place is transformed into oh-too-packed Blues Mecca with little-known but talent-rich A.K.A. as the house

band. hats off to the hotel for letting mayhem rule.

It's the last place open and it always seems to attract a great late-night jam for those in the know.

You can always see the festival organizers there along with musicians and technicians. It's easy to recognize the festival organizers. They're the ones with the big self-satisfied smiles. (Who loves ya baby!) What the hell. They deserve it!

As is becoming festival tradition, A.K.A. put on a great show with sittings by Mike Doyle, Glenn Igersol, Roger Howse, Joe Murphy and Theresa Malenfant. What a show! I thought I'd died and gone to Blues heaven.

I was so into the scene, I thought I might get up and sing myself. But, Al, it might have been the cuervo gold doing the thinking. I rolled out of the river room at closing... sat on the curb with Theresa Malenfant, mumbling something about the greatest little festival in the east. She agreed.

Your friend in recovery, *Gord.*
 P.S. I was with the reviewer you'd assigned to day three. I hope he made it. Maybe you should consider hiring a more responsible staff.



groove, long before Frank hands them an NBLCC card... Normally your passport into the netherworld of live blues, you know.

Things began at the tent with a knock-your-socks-off-and-dance Cajun style by the Hillstreet Blues Band from Saint John.

The Hill Brothers, Mark and Steve, know how to rock. I loved the accordion; although the hangover was beginning to wear down my patience for non-alcoholic spirits.

A consensus developed that we, myself and my cohorts in crime (if memory serves, you yourself were in the pack) should head over to the Cosmo to catch long John Baldry's happy hour show.

Baldry was in fine form. He put the audience right in the sweet spot of his gargantuan sweaty palm. A good storyteller, that long John. And I admired him for giving credit to the first-rate local talent backup in the form of Bassist Lloyd Hanson, Pian-

festivals are all about. They bring the best out of up-and-comers and legends. You have to credit festival organizers for getting him on the bill. And the Cosmo was the perfect gig. I liked that intimate feeling the show gave me. You're close to the performer, yet never too far from the bar.

My hangover, not a distant memory, I took advantage of the warm glow returning to my head and headed over to the playhouse to catch a few dreamy licks from Jazz singer Rane Lee. This woman can sing and she's the consummate performer. A classy act in a

classy venue. God knows I felt out of place, quietly hidden away at the back of the balcony. But her voice and presence were such a draw for me, I couldn't bare to leave. I stayed to watch an appreciative audience offer the Brooklyn-come-Montreal Native two standing ovations. Not bad for a sometimes tight-assed town that seldom lays eyes on a great jazz

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