

ARTS & CULTURE

Sea of rain invades Great Big Picnic

Sounds of Great Big Sea, others pour over Citadel

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

Saturday's rain and cold couldn't dampen the spirits of those on Citadel Hill for last weekend's Great Big Picnic. Concertgoers huddled under blankets, tarps and make-shift raincoats, but they didn't leave after bad weather, and they waited for Great Big Sea.

As Great Big Sea's Alan Doyle elegantly put it "What odds? it's only a bit of rain."

The Great Big Picnic is Great Big Sea's attempt to create Atlantic Canada's biggest kitchen party. They had the music, they had the beer, and they had the people. They had everything but the kitchen sink. It's just too bad



have the kitchen ceiling.

With the Ennis Sisters, The Chieftains and Great Big Sea headlining and surprise appearances by the Barra MacNeils and Ashley MacIsaac, the Picnic could easily have been mistaken as a tour for the recently released *Fire In The Kitchen* album. But with the addition of bands like Bran Van 3000, the Philosopher Kings, and Colin James and his Little Big Band, there was a definite twist added to the traditional Atlantic Canadian fare.

The Picnic got rolling at around 3pm with Newfoundland's

Ennis Sisters opening the show with fitting verve and energy. The crowd was greeted happily by some recognized favourites of the local maritime trio.

Bran Van 3000 played a phenomenally fun but short set. The Bran Van crew filled up the stage and energized all those in the front rows. Anyone near the speakers I'm sure had their fillings rattled out by the bass in the speakers and the groove in their sneakers. Bran Van's music was refreshingly different from the other members of the picnic's line up.

Next, Irish band the Chieftains added to the kitchen party atmosphere with some good ol' Celtic tunes. They were joined on stage by Cape Breton's Barra MacNeils at the end of their set for a rendition of the Barra's "Rattlin' Roaring Willie." The step dancers during the Chieftains' set added a special air of privilege and class to the show.

Then the Philosopher Kings jazzed things up and the concert twisted away from the celtic/folky side. With a hopping set and energy that reached right up the hill, these guys were definitely among the evening's best entertainers.

Next came the Watchmen, who put on a good show but were not quite as upbeat as the rest of the performers. Watchmen fans seemed more than happy with the set, but I couldn't help but wonder if the group really fit in with the rest of the line-up.

Colin James and the Little Big Band followed with a swinging set, but it almost didn't get going. After only three songs they were forced to break due to technical difficulties, but after a 15 minute delay, they were able to finish their set. During the technical difficulties it was



disappointing to hear the fans yelling "Great Big Sea" during what was supposed to be James' set.

And then, of course, there was Great Big Sea. All of a sudden, the rain didn't matter. Blankets and rain gear were forgotten and the entire crowd got to their

feet. Who can really sit through "Mari Mac", anyway? Courageous students swarmed to the stage only to be crushed by the crowds, while the more conservative stayed at their chairs on the hill — but everyone was dancing.

Playing favourites from *Up and Play*, as well as previewing new songs from their upcoming CD (to be released in the summer of 1999), Great Big Sea kept the crowd hopping for an hour-and-a-half. Then, joined by the Chieftains and Ashley MacIsaac, they came on for a final climactic encore, which they accepted on behalf of all the bands there.

Most in attendance seemed to agree that it was a great



concert, but it lacked the cohesiveness needed to keep everyone interested for an entire day. It could have been the weather, the long breaks between acts, or the musical range in the lineup, but in the end I didn't feel they created the kitchen party atmosphere they were aiming for. It was more like seeing a bunch of little concerts all day long, without having to hop venues.

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