

Diverse artists spice up Porquis Blues Festival

Culture and heritage are alive and well in our area, and they were living in perfect harmony at the Porquis 2009 Blues Festival.

In fact this year, Porquis offered its most diverse set of musical artists, players and genres in its 12-year history.

Let me say, no one has forgotten how acts like The Downchild Blues Band and Dutch Mason blew the roof off Porquis in past years and Porquis developed its reputation as "the little festival that could."

But, on a pure musical level, fans this year were treated to its largest palate of tempting entrees.

In fact, Porquis has always had the community/Northern Ontario feel since its inception.

But this year, culture and heritage ruled.

Let me explain. Watching Elmer Ferrer, an outstanding world-class Cuban musician who has played all over the globe and on no less than 30 CDs, do a workshop performance on Saturday afternoon in front of 60 people inside the recreation building was an absolute jaw-dropping experience. It plainly showed music has no boundaries.

The perfect flip of that scenario was a Friday night set by Northern Ontario musicians. Kapuskasing's Barrelhouse Blues Band drew a large crowd to its feet for an encore with a blistering set. The Shaftmen (after a 20-minute power failure) then proceeded to have fans sing and dance to original songs with iconic Northern Ontario lyrical references about underground mining, Highway 144, and Noah Timmins.

That folks is a world-class cultural exchange taking place. Before this weekend, I don't think anyone would have thought this possible including the organizers.

I say bravo to Ben Lefebvre, Don Elliot and the team for having the insight and funding to book this artistic collection



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ROCK REPORT

of musicians from all genres, all related in some way to educating the listener and fan.

Other instances of this cultural exchange were Ojibwa rocker Billy Joe Green's 90-minute set of terrific blues.

Let me remind folks, this was after driving two days from his native Manitoba. Throw that up against some of my fave jazz-inspired moments from Juno Award-winner Julian Fauth and his band who gave so much space and air to each other's musical inspiration.

Again you can contrast Kap's Al Lukas and Sudbury's Paul DiSalle's scaled-down trio sets with the crowd dancing to Soul Doubt's 12-piece cover-song set Friday night with fans listening and digging into 20-something-year old Tim Vaughn's mostly original and killer world/roots/blues set of from his CD *Two Tone* early Saturday night coupled Erin McCallum's dangerous mostly original blues noon set.

In addition, the Porquis festival, since its inception, has also brought a family vibe — a credit to its founding members

I brought my grandson James, a budding eight-year-old harmonica player to the festival. He also could feel the culture and heritage vibe and diversification.

I can't say I watched every set by every artist. The reason is basic human nature. My grandson developed a fever as night fell and we were on our way.

As we celebrate our 100th-year anniversaries, the City of Timmins should take note that this kind of culture and heritage exchange not only took place but it had a genuine air of communication.

Bravo from The Rock Report.

John Emms is a Timmins musician, songwriter and performer.