
PACKAGE TOURS '97

Too many bands
Too little time
Too damn broke

The FLEADH Festival

Randall's Island, New York City
by Randy Mack

"Hello?"

"Hi, it's me, Linnea. I was wondering if you wanted to go to the flawed fest?"

"The flawed fest?"

"No, the FLAH fest."

"The FLAW fest?"

"No, dumbass, the F-L-E-A-D-H fest."

"That spells 'flaw'? Hello? Hello?"

I ended up at the Fleadh Festival anyway. The Fleadh is a two day celebration of Irish music, each day lasting roughly 12 hours with the music spread across four stages.

"A day of Irish music" is usually enough to make me run screaming in the other direction, but fortunately, the Fleadh broadens its definition of Irish to include those living near Ireland (Billy Bragg, who's British), those whose great-great grandparents were Irish (Natalie Merchant, Mary Black), those who occasionally do Irish songs (Sinead O'Connor), out-right Canadians (Moxi Fruvous), and, uh, the Neville Brothers, whose plodding, sanitized idea of funk originates in New Orleans. In other words, the Fleadh expands its definition to include performers someone might actually be interested in seeing. All in all, there were 25 bands and acts playing on the second day alone.

We went the second day, missing Sinead O'Connor but getting

the better lineup anyway. Most performers played both days; Day Two had Freedy Johnston instead of O'Connor, and promised a "Special Guest." We got stuck with the Neville Brothers— the only real low-point in an otherwise solid day of interesting music.

The headliner was Van Morrison, who was very good, looking like the Singing Godfather surrounded by a large band of cronies, all pushed to the front of the stage to boost the "Statesman surrounded by Secret Service" effect. Natalie Merchant was also good, even with a band that seemed composed of her friends from her weekly Suburban Gardening discussion group. She dragged an obviously humoring her Billy Bragg onstage to do Oasis' "Supersonic"— and then playfully chastised him when he sang the whole chorus instead of the one line she had "given" him. He took it gracefully, making faces when her back was turned. This was definitely the highlight of the show.

Bragg himself was an amazing surprise. I had never heard him, and I was blown away. His set was solo acoustic, and commanded the audience's attention in a way that no other act could manage. Moxi Fruvous was very cute. I liked their hardcore rap version of "Green Eggs & Ham" the best. They're probably better on tape.

The Fleadh Festival was, in the end, a great value for the price, about \$70 for both days, \$35 for one. If they can keep their lineups

equally strong in the coming years, it will be a hard fest to beat. In the meantime, keep your eye on it— next year they might snag U2.

Warped Tour

Three County Fairgrounds,
Northampton, MA
by Zack Ordynans

Are most of these bands angry because they're just unknown or unknown because they're just angry? Hmm... Either way, this mediocre lineup of punk and ska bands (Less Than Jake and Reel Big Fish? Aren't they the same band?) amounted to a show that was... loud.

But let's face it: the Bosstones, who are only getting better live, stole the show with an extended set that drew from all five of their studio organizations. Other highlights included Social Distortion, The Descendants, and the Gatorade stand. One other cool thing was the prices, with tickets going for less than \$20, free parking, and cheap food. All of the other festival organizers should take note (or I should say, I wish they would take note).

Ozzfest '97

Giants Stadium, New York
by Jason Siderman

I was first introduced to Ozzy in the eighth grade. I don't know why I liked him so much; it must have been an adolescent sense of

rebellion kicking in.

Giants Stadium didn't want this show to start with, and so they decided to ban Marilyn Manson from playing the show. Ozzy took the stadium to court and won the right to put Manson back on the bill. I decided to see what all the hype was about, so I picked up a couple of tickets and went to the show with an old metalhead buddy of mine.

I got to the show in the middle of the first act, which was Fear Factory. They were nothing exciting. Neither were Type O Negative, who played next.

Then came Pantera. Phil Anselmo took the stage and got the crowd all riled up. People started climbing down the nine foot wall that divides the first mezzanine from the floor. It was complete anarchy as I watched state troopers and concert staff go at it with the fans. In the end, there were 136 ejections, 36 arrests, and dozens of injuries.

Marilyn Manson followed Pantera, and for all the hype they were nothing exciting. Then came the moment that we were all waiting for: "Ozzy! Ozzy! Ozzy! Ozzy!" was the chant roaring through the crowd as the headliner hit the stage. Ozzy came out and did a short set of hits, followed by the reunion of Black Sabbath.

By the end of this 7 hour barrage of metal noise, I was ready for two Tylenols and my bed. With the exception of Ozzy and

the reunion of Black Sabbath, this was one concert to miss.

The H.O.R.D.E. Festival

Hartford Meadows, Conn.

by Randy Mack

This year's HORDE show was the worst-kept secret of the summer, in the summer when promoters realized that people will not pay \$45 to see one band when they can pay \$45 to see 12. The lineup was dazzling, although changing from show to show: constants included Neil Young & Crazy Horse (the headliners, natch), Toad the Wet Sprocket, Beck, the Ben Folds Five, Primus, and Leftover Salmon.

The show in Hartford also had Morphine, Medeski, Martin & Wood, Kula Shaker, and Cake Like. HORDE staggered the schedule between two stages so that a) you saw everybody, b) there was nonstop music, and c) you exhausted yourself sprinting back and forth, thus requiring more beverages from the snack bar.

The music at the HORDE show was, simply put, awesome. Even Beck, despite the occasional energy lag, put on a great show, stealing every performance cliché ever created, with special rock-the-house thievery from James Brown, and, in perfect Beck fashion, managed to exploit the shtick of his music forefathers and par-

odize the living fuck out of them.

For example, Beck sang an entire ballad, (the creatively titled "I wanna get with you (and your sister Deborah)") in the highest, sweetest falsetto he could muster, and as the song reached climax, he began to wipe his eyes and mutter "I'm going to be alright" into the mic. He then left the stage and wouldn't come back on until he had hugged all the members of the band.

The problem with the HORDE show is the packaging. HORDE is the same tacky corporate arena-rock event that it insists it isn't. HORDE claims that its hippie colors and design, and origins with Blues Traveler (nobody's idea of a band known for its integrity), means that it cannot possibly be the mainstream, exploitive, anything-for-a-buck capitalist enterprise of say, the Monsters of Rock or Lollapalooza.

Well, look again. The sponsors of HORDE include General Motors, Microsoft, Sony, and Kool cigarettes. When Neil Young sang "This Note's For You" ("Ain't singing for Pepsi/Ain't singing for Coke/Won't sing for nobody/Makes me look like a joke"), I almost barfed on the hypocrisy.

Politics aside, the music was still superb. Big surprises were Toad the Wet Sprocket, a band I always thought of as very mediocre, until I heard their set and realized that they were the band behind every sort-of-kind-of-pretty-good-nothing-special rock song on the radio for the last 3 years. You have to admire consistency— they're simply pretty good and will never surpass that until they cave in and hire Michael Stipe.

One thing that made the music so good was its diversity, especially in the bands I had never heard of. Leftover Salmon is a hardcore-bluegrass band, playing



People at the HORDE show watch the Ben Folds Five with agape expressions of pure ecstasy.

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what I can only describe as the Dixie Dregs by way of Junior Vasquez.

The Ben Folds Five didn't live up to their promise, but they did live up to their name: the three member band added a string quartet to their act, jumping to the next highest prime. If these guys can tighten up their song writing and use their self-indulgence more creatively, they'll be a force to be reckoned with. Kula Shaker was damn good— imagine Oasis if they weren't smug and resting on their limited talents.

The HORDE fest was quite great, musically. I think that you might be better off buying or trading for a bootleg of it— I hear there was a taping section.

Lollapalooza '97

Randall's Island, New York City
by Jason Sideman

Thinking that it was about time, I decided to finally check out this year's Lollapalooza. After dropping Jon Spencer and only having sold 12,500 of 27,500 tickets to the country's largest market, the show went on.

The main stage had few good offerings. It started out with Damian and Julian Marley covering a short set of their father's songs. Next to take the stage were the unintelligible Korn. Then came Tricky, who was painful to

sit through. Next up was one of the highlights of the day: Snoop Doggy Dog.

Even more impressive than Snoop's set was the way that the crowd seemed to embrace him. Snoop enjoyed the show as well. He told the crowd that he, "loves their dance" (moshing). All of that changed when someone in the crowd turned their aggression toward the stage, hitting Snoop with a grapefruit. Snoop was obviously pretty upset, and he had some choice words for the crowd. Tool's set, which followed Snoop's, seemed to wet my palate and I found them interesting to watch.

On the second stage there was Artificial Joy Club, Jeremy Toback, Old 97's, the Eels, and Summercamp. There was also a surprise set from Porno For Pyros.

To encourage less moshing this year, the staff would put an X on your hand if you crowd surfed over the gate, and the second time you were ejected from the facility. During the Tool set, 543 people were ejected.

In the end, I felt that the show lacked enough drawing power on the main stage. Something was missing at this year's show, and it wasn't just the crowd.

New England Ska Festival

Nashoba Valley Ski Resort, Mass.

by Zack Ordynans

If 1967 was remembered as the "Summer of Love," the summer of '97 may yet go down as the "Summer of Big, Dumb Festival Concerts." Or, with the success of Sublime, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, and Reel Big Fish (among others), it might fall in musical memory as the year ska finally became accepted as a mainstream musical style. Either way the New England Ska Festival was an oddly defining moment for the current musical era.

Not that any of that had much to do with the music itself, which was for the most part very good. Spring Heeled Jack was, as usual, a very entertaining band to watch and a lot of fun for the few thousand rude boys (and girls) in attendance. Skavooie and The Epitones, featuring Clark's own Ben Jaffe on tenor sax, also played a strong set showcasing songs from their new album, *Ripe*. The Amazing Royal Crowns mixed things up a bit with their popular neo-rockabilly sound, and ska veterans Bim Skala Bim were solid but a little bit more bland than the other main stage bands.

Headliners: The Skatalites, who have been together on and off for the last thirty five years, closed out the show with their jazzy, mellow, mostly instrumental songs that only sounded better when compared with the seven hours worth of bands that preceded them.

Which brings us to the main problem with this show, one of many other outdoor festivals growing in popularity: there are too many bands in too little time. It makes sense for the promoters, bands, and record labels to be involved in a larger tour because of the money and exposure that they generate. And for the fans it is a reasonable price to pay (in this case, under \$20) to see any number of their favorite bands



left to right: Cathy O'Brien, Mollie Wittstein's folded arms, Aidan Reynolds, and Randy Mack, seconds before being ejected from the HORDE concert.

play together. But in reality, the involvement of so many bands—and in this case, so many bands playing the same style of music—creates a loss of focus on any of the individual bands. While this show was interesting because of the sheer number of bands, including lesser-knowns like The Piffers, Skinnerbox, and Thumper, who were the second stage highlights, it was marred by short, surface-scratching sets even by the headliners.

The crowd, though, had a great time skankin' on the ski slope. As Bim Skala Bim noted during their set, "Based on the looks of things, this is the first annual New England Ska Festival." And judging by the crowd's energetic response to his statement, and the event, he was probably right.

Tibetan Freedom Festival

Randalls Island, New York City
by Zachary Ordynans

The "big daddy" of this summer's many extravagantly extraneous package tours, this one had a couple of theoretical advantages over the competition:

1) The whole thing was for a good cause. In addition to sending a bunch of the proceeds to the fight for Tibetan independence, the crowd was educated throughout the program by activists from Tibet and the rest of world who spoke about the struggle against China.

2) U2, Pearl Jam, Beastie Boys, R.E.M., Sonic Youth, Rancid, the Bosstones, Bjork, Blur, KRS-One, Biz Markie, Pavement, Noel Gallagher, Patti Smith, Foo Fighters, Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Radiohead, Alanis Morissette...

The reality, however, was an excellent show that could have been set up a whole lot better. The problems were:

1) The idea of teaching a bunch of young people about the

Tibetan plight may have sounded good on paper, but look at it realistically: there were close to 30,000 New Yorkers on hand, many of them drunk or high, most of them under 20. Trying to get a crowd like that to listen respectfully to a monk speaking at length in another language when everyone knows that Rancid are playing next is like trying to teach your dog how to roll over after you already gave him the reward. You can try, but it's just not gonna happen.

2) It's true that all of those bands did play during the two day outdoor festival, but only the Beastie Boys played longer than half an hour. U2 played a little over twenty minutes, and they only played songs from their weak new album. Sonic Youth played four instrumentals during their half hour set. Alanis played new, acoustic songs- and even her biggest fans quickly lost interest. And Noel Gallagher proved once and for all why his little brother Liam sings for their band, Oasis.

Another problem was the scheduling. For some reason, there were no schedules anywhere, and bands would play on either of the two stages with no

If 1967 was the "Summer of Love," the summer of 1997 will be known as the "Summer of Big, Dumb Festival Concerts."

apparent order to the chaos. A lot of that weekend went something like this:

"So uh, who do you think'll be on next?"

"I don't know. That guitar looks like the guy from U2's... I think we should wait at this stage." The crowd in the distance suddenly cheers wildly.

"Shit! That's Radiohead playing on the other stage!"

Some of the bands didn't even wait until the noon start time that

was printed on the tickets before they started their sets. The first day, I missed Ben Harper and most Jon Spencer Blues Explosion sets because of an early start, and on the second day I missed the unannounced acoustic set by Pearl Jam for the same reason.

Last round of bitching before I get to what was good about the show: it was expensive, I sat through a two hour traffic jam in the parking lot Sunday night, and why were the bands limited to playing for half an hour when the whole thing was done by eight o'clock anyway?

What I Liked:

- Foo Fighters played an excellent, crowd pleasing set.
 - Blur managed to get the whole crowd chanting "Woo hoo!" long before they played "Song 2."
 - Rancid brought out members of the ska band Stubborn All Stars for a few songs.
 - Mighty Mighty Bosstones gave a shoutout to the Toasters.
 - Patti Smith chastising the photographers for blocking the view from the crowd during her surprisingly great set.
 - The Beastie Boys played "53rd and 3rd" by the Ramones (in honor of Randalls Island being "the closest to Queens that we've ever played") and a punk version of Billy Joel's "Big Shot."
 - In what must have been one of alternative rock's most curious moments, Mike Mills and Michael Stipe from R.E.M. jammed with Eddie Vedder and Mike McCready of Pearl Jam with Mike D. on drums. Together, they stormed through Iggy Pop's "The Passenger" among other covers.
 - Radiohead played a short set, but they energized the crowd with their dynamic performance.
- Overall, this was a show that was, hands down, the concert event of the summer. Maybe next year they'll learn from this year's mistakes (assuming Tibet is still not free by then).