Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

BeachLife Music Festival Gets It Right

Steve Gottfried · Wednesday, May 15th, 2019

The City of Redondo Beach hosted its first-ever BeachLife Festival with an eclectic lineup of 40 bands on three stages spread over three days from Friday May 3rd to Sunday May 5th. The festival promoters chose well with an impressive roster of headliners which included Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, Bob Weir, Willie Nelson, Jason Mraz and Sugar Ray as well as a wide array of local talent on the smaller Rip Tide Stage.

The beauty of music festivals like this is you can pick and choose which performers speak to you and skip the others. And occasionally, the unexpected happens when you come across a band you'd never heard of that rings your bell. For me, the big draw was Jason Mraz, whom I'd never seen live. And the other was the '80s synth pop band Berlin, known for a string of hits like "No More Words," "Metro," "Sex" and "Masquerade" that left an indelible mark on the '80s music scene with its industrial Euro sound. Little did I know the band was comprised of SoCal natives by way of Orange County. Lead Singer Terri Nunn brought the magic of the '80s back like a bolt of lightning, stalking the stage like she stepped out of one of their vintage MTV videos. Dressed in a fashionable blue trench coat mini and knee-high black boots, Nunn unleashed the hits with powerful, crystal clear vocals. And the crowd loved every minute. While only Terri and founder John Crawford remain from the original band, the distinctive sound was completely intact. She also debuted some new music which included a moving tribute to her mother's passing called "Transcendance." Nunn ended the set with her solo hit from *Top Gun* "Take My Breath Away" which she dedicated to some of her family members in the audience. But what really made it unique was how she strode through the crowd on a security guard's shoulders, making a personal connection with the crowd while singing the nostalgic ballad flawlessly.

The main course, for me, was Jason Mraz, whom I'd sampled over the years but never followed wholeheartedly. This was my chance to see him live and he did not disappoint. Backed by a band of 5 women and 4 men, most of whom were wearing multicolored jumpsuits, Mraz took the stage rocking his own black jumpsuit with splashes of color, sunglasses and hat. Mraz looked like the cool goofball we know him to be, the less-ripped but more accessible version of Adam Levine. Mraz started off the set a little tentatively, but grew increasingly comfortable as he settled into his groove, breezing through his hits with an ease which was perfectly suited to this outdoor beach festival set amidst surf, sand and swaying palm trees. I entered as a curious newbie, but left a baptized true believer. In his super-chill, unassuming way, J-raz (a term I hereby coin) brought a magical and infectious buoyancy to a set that encompassed a generous sampling of his hits. The king of good vibes (his Good Vibes Tour is already underway) worked his magic on the crowd with signature hits like "Unlonely," "I'm Yours," "Lucky," "Have it All," among others. Mraz not

only wears his heart on his sleeve but has it literally inscribed on his guitar with the words “Be Love.” The message in his songs is unabashedly romantic, but not in a saccharine way. Under Mraz’s stewardship, music flows organically and wafts through the crowd like a warm summer breeze. Like the pied piper of love, Mraz reminds us that love is the most potent weapon against hate and negativity. While there was no overt political statement, Mraz has curated a body of work which embodies the love that has been under siege in much of our public (and fraught political) discourse since the 2016 election. This is the true healing power of music and the antidote we so desperately need. As I left, an iconic headliner was on the main stage performing for a massive crowd. I heard a few familiar songs, iconic hits from another era that should’ve pulled me in. But after Mraz’s indie vibe, the headliner’s set felt tired and dated and I wasn’t ready to wash off the Mraz spell I was under. I left in a Mraz-induced bubble of serenity.

Terri Nunn turns back time with ’80s hits at BeachLife Festival.

While Mraz and Berlin were what drew me to the festival, I caught some lesser-known artists which really impressed me. The first of these was a local band called Alinea, comprised of 4 college kids (ranging in age from 18 to 20) churning out some fresh indie surf punk songs at the smaller Rip Tide stage. In a music world often saturated by homogenized youtube phenoms, Alinea is a refreshing alternative with a fresh, irreverent sound. The four-person band includes John Barry on lead vocals and guitar, Ben Tyrrell also on vocals and guitar, Lance Meliota on drums and Shannon Ennis on Bass. Several have been friends since grade school. They performed a set of 8 original songs plus an excellent cover of The Talking Heads “Psycho Killer” – a testament to their good taste. Tyrrell stands out as the cut-up, who entertained the crowd with his musings between songs and goofball physical antics which kept the set energetic and unpredictable.

Local band Alinea performs at BeachLife Music Festival.

The other bonus discovery was Anuhea, an abbreviated version of the lead singer’s formal name, Rylee Anuheakealaokalokelani Jenkins. Anuhea hails from Hawaii and brings a reggae infused Hawaiian pop fusion to her music. Her lovely voice and beautiful island vibe had the midday crowd grooving to her beats in the sand at the Low Tide Stage. Highlights from her set included “Simple Love Song,” “Higher than the Clouds” and “Big Deal” which she wrote as an homage to Ron Burgundy’s pickup line from one of her favorite movies, *Anchorman*.

The only downside of the music festival, for me, was the occasional aroma of pot in the air. Though it was essentially billed as a smoke-free festival, they didn’t enforce it. But that seems to be the case these days, whether you’re at the Hollywood Bowl or walking down a trendy shopping district.

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