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Festival off to a wet but enthusiastic start

By Heather Willard Messenger Staff Journalist Jun 2, 2018



The singer from Sunflower Bean wails out a number on the Main Stage.

Messenger photo by John Halley

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NELSONVILLE — The 14th annual Nelsonville Music Festival got off to a wet, but enthusiastic second day on Friday, with performances starting in the late morning hours as scheduled despite the intermittent showers.

David Bear, a volunteer who was working as the emcee of the Boxcar Stage, has been volunteering at the festival since it was founded.



“It’s such a unique place to see all kinds of different bands,” he mused. “It’s not one genre — there are certainly headliners and people you recognize, but most of the people you never hear of.”

He said that the intimate settings and quality food all come together each year to create a “good vibe.”

“It’s just always incredible, it’s hard to compare,” he said. “Tim (Peacock) does a good job of having people who are classics in their genre, kind of honoring those folks. The Gories are a rock band that kind of fit into that this year. So Tim really does a masterful job of blending genres.”

Bear noted that the police presence was a little higher than previous years, noting the addition of a police tower that overlooked much of the grounds.

"I'm not too sure about the tower, not sure I understand that, other than it's a good view," he said. "Generally the police presence at the fest has been very low-key, it hasn't been a problem. They're not really out here looking to bust people for drugs or whatnot, you've really got to work hard to stand out."

That tower comes as the festival introduced a new bag policy requiring festival-goers to either carry a bag about a hands-width in size or be a clear bag within 13 inches by 17 inches. Such bag rules are becoming standard operating procedure for festival organizers.

One thing that separates the music festival from others is its focus on environmentalism, aided by the festival's partnership with Zero Waste Event Productions.

ZWEP began as part of Rural Action's Zero Waste, which itself was first organized as a recycling effort specific to the Nelsonville Music Festival. Now ZWEP also works with several other large event partners such as the Ohio Pawpaw Festival and Number Fest.

Shannon Pratt-Harrington is one of the three worker-owners of ZWEP and said that last year the group was able to divert 92 percent of the Nelsonville festival's waste from the landfill.

"All of the vendors here sell on compostable serviceware — compostable forks, compostable cups," she said. "What Zero Waste Event Productions does is make sure that waste is actually clean. At a lot of festivals when you compost things people will put, for example, a can in with the compostables and you have to throw it all out because it's contaminated. But we make sure the compost is super clean so when we take it to the compost facility they'll take it and turn it into dirt."

She said all the trash for the weekend will fit into two 30-yard roll-off dumpsters, and that without ZWEP the festival would likely fill closer to seven dumpsters, even though the festival usually attracts 7,000-8,000 attendees.

“This is a really cool aspect of sustainability. I don’t think most people at music festivals think about the trash,” Pratt-Harrington continued. “I think if people could visualize it they would pay more attention, so that’s why we’re trying to be visible at these events, so people really see what’s going on.”

The festival is primarily geared toward music fans, but has other things to fill the time between sets. Among these features is a mini ramp set up along the train tracks on the way into the festival. The ramp was transported to the location from Meigs County and was a project in conjunction with FlipSide Skate Shop of Athens.

Both ends of the ramp were open for festival guests to paint on them. One end was more professional, featuring work from a Columbus artist group called Abnormal Allies, while the other was full of splatters and creations from kids. When it wasn’t raining, the ramp was open for semi-professional skate-boarders who also gave kids a chance to drop in.

A common sight at the festival is Passion Works Studio art. Nancy Epling, the program director for Creative Foundations, explained that all of the art came from Passion Works but is a collaborative effort that included help from Honey for the Heart and Creative Abundance thanks to Patty Mitchell’s involvement. Mitchell founded all three organizations and is now the creative director for Passion Works, bringing the three projects into a closer relationship.

“They’re all the same seed and they all have kind of the same aesthetic,” Epling said. “Now that Patty Mitchell is back as the studio creative director at Passion Works, we kind of work side-by-side. I’m the programmer, she’s doing the creative side of things.”

She explained that Passion Works artists and staff created many pieces for the festival, including some large-scale paintings of artists performing over the weekend, circles with funky designs, papier-mache flowers and more.

“With our papier-mache balls, they were made into disco balls because we had recycled CDs that people didn’t want,” Epling said. “We had a bunch of old guitars donated from Blue Eagle (Music). (The owner) always brings over violins, guitars, mandolins that he can’t fix, so we thought to make those into disco balls. Most of our work is either inspired or driven by recycled materials or stuff that’s donated, so that’s where we came from.”

According to Bear, who emceed the Boxcar Stage, the festival is unique for other reasons as well.

“Most of these festivals, you know the big ones, the tickets go to private corporations and you see big Pepsi and gear signs everywhere,” he said. “It’s not that here. The proceeds go to a non-profit, the whole thing is run on volunteer power, thousands of volunteers. This place really sets some standards around the country for the scale, the mix, the inclusion of women and people of color in that mix. And that’s really empowering.”

The festival continues through Sunday at Hocking College’s Robbins Crossing.

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Nelsonville Music Festival 2018

