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Buddy Guy, Levon Helm, CSN Brighten Gathering of the Vibes

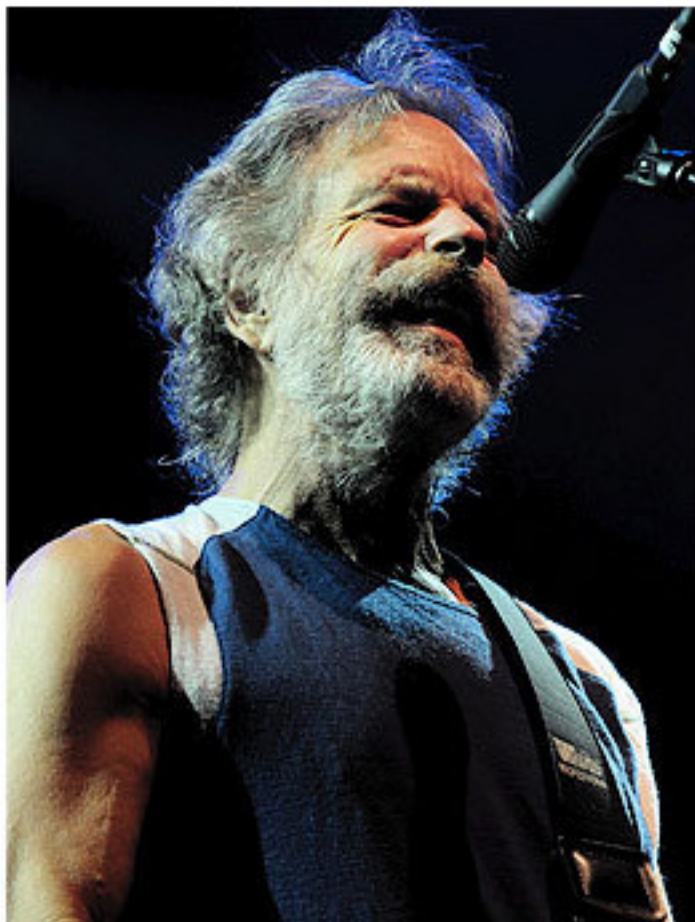
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The storms that ripped through Seaside Park in Bridgeport, Connecticut, over the weekend flooded parts of the concert field at the Gathering of the Vibes, making things smell as funky as some of the bands playing the four-day festival. But the foul weather didn't discourage the enlightened spirits of the 20,000 or so gathered for the 14th year of the festival that began as a tribute to the late Jerry Garcia. Gathering of the Vibes has evolved into a dependable stop on the summer festival circuit — a sort of Bonnaroo-lite complete with mind-expanding music and consciousness-expanding chemicals.

On Friday, after technical problems marred an otherwise standard party set by George Clinton, moe. had to cut their headlining set short due to a violent lightning storm. (The day before, the Dark Star Orchestra were victims of “onstage flooding.”) Lettuce, a seven-piece supergroup of sidemen from popular touring jam-funk bands, took full advantage under the side stage tent during a raging, two-hour late-night set of mostly original funk that paid homage to James Brown, Sly Stone, Parliament/Funkadelic and the Meters.

Covers, in fact, were the order of the weekend. The Assembly of Dust capped their Saturday afternoon set with an extended, raucous rendition of the Who's “Listening to You.” Guster did their best “(Don't Fear) the Reaper,” the Blue Oyster Cult hit known better — at least by this crowd — as the “More Cowbell” song. (For their set, Guster stayed onstage and skipped the encore, or, as Adam Gardner called it, “one of the bullshit rituals in rock & roll.”) Lettuce took on the Jackson 5's “I Want You Back.” Crosby, Stills and Nash played the Rolling Stones' “Ruby Tuesday.” Even the McLovins, a local rock trio comprised of talented kids with learner's permits, covered “Backwards Down the Number Line,” a song off of Phish's upcoming studio album ([read more about the Phishy trio at the Smoking Section](#)).



Bob Weir, whose Ratdog headlined Saturday, joined Levon Helm for a brassy version of the Dead's "Tennessee Jed" during Helm's Cajun-tinged set. The Band's legendary drummer performed horn-accompanied Band songs — "The Weight," "Chest Fever," "Long Black Veil" — and Bob Dylan's "Simple Twist of Fate" alongside rollicking, traditional swamp blues and Mardi Gras-worthy rock.

Weir, sporting an NBA tank top and white beard that was Jerry-thick, dipped into the Dead's back-catalog for "Bertha," "Bird Song," a reggae-infused "Jack Straw," and "Scarlet Begonias," for which Weir was joined by former Grateful Dead vocalist Donna Jean Godchaux.

On Sunday, Grace Potter — Godchaux's heiress as the lone, legitimate female sex symbol on the jam band circuit — switched effortlessly between organ and a Flying V guitar to deliver a sexy, soulful set that featured Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit." The 26-year-old Vermonter left her backing band, the Nocturnals, behind for transcendent, a cappella version of "Nothing But the

Water" before they returned to the stage for a full-on blues-rock epilogue.

Buddy Guy, wearing Pumas, took a break from the heat during his afternoon set to introduce Quinn Sullivan, his prepubescent prodigy, who shredded on Hendrix's "Voodoo Chile." His four-foot frame and *Family Guy* T-shirt were the only reminders Sullivan is a 10-year-old phenom and not a 72-year-old, grizzled blues legend. "I had to cool off," Guy told the crowd. "But you didn't miss nuttin' — he's a monster."

Crosby, Stills and Nash closed the Gathering of the Vibes by delivering the most family friendly set of the weekend. CSN opened with Stephen Stills' hit "Love the One You're With" and during "Southern Cross," Stills forgot the second verse, but recovered in time to deliver a welcome guitar solo. More rain — and a tornado warning — made CSN end their set promptly at 7:45.

Despite the weather, heat and party favors, there were few arrests and even fewer incidents, though one death ("medically related," according to police) was the first on-site fatality in the history of the festival.

Dylan Stableford

Photos by: Max Flatow. © Gathering of the Vibe