

Sam's Music Page

SATURDAY, AUGUST 18, 2007

Gathering of the Vibes

Last Saturday, April & I took the trip up to Bridgeport, CT to check out the [Gathering of the Vibes Festival](#). We had a great time and would recommend it to anyone even thinking about going next year. Having it by the water in Bridgeport was nice, but going through the middle of Bridgeport can be a little disconcerting. Once you were inside the festival, everything was extremely cool. There was a really great family atmosphere; a lot of people had their kids there. Also, the diversity in ages at the show was very cool. It ranged from 15 or 16 year-olds that really seemed to enjoy the music, all the way to some greybeards that must have been in their late 60's.

The venue was well laid-out. Regardless of where you were standing, you could always hear the music very clearly. Even when we were very close to the stage, it didn't get too loud or muffled. Also, unless you were standing behind the soundboard or one of the canopies that people put up towards the back of the field, you could see the stages very well. They had the two main stages set up adjacent to each other at a concave angle to the crowd. If you wanted to, you could claim a spot and stay there the whole day with excellent viewing of both stages. This does mean that unlike larger festivals, there is only one "main" band playing at any time. There were two other small stages set up. One was by the food vending area, and the other stage was set up as a free stage for everyone (beachgoers, bridgeport residents, and festival attendees) but it was nearly three miles down the beach on the other side of one of the larger camping areas. We briefly checked out the stage by the food area during one of the breaks in the lineup, but didn't make it down the marathon trail to the far one.

The music lineup was great, and we got to see a bunch of bands that we haven't had the pleasure of enjoying. We missed two acts because we got on the road a little later than planned, but here's the lineup we caught:

1) [Donna Jean & The Tricksters](#) - Way good. The second best act of the day (after Ratdog). I wasn't sure how this was going to be, but April & I both enjoyed this set very much. Donna Jean Godchaux was a vocalist with the Grateful Dead in the 70's. "The Tricksters" portion of the band play when they're without Donna Jean as [The Zen Tricksters](#). It was a real good jam infused set that got the sizable (early-in-the-day) crowd moving. When they're not on the festival circuit, they're playing some relatively small venues. I'd recommend seeing them (either at Donna Jean & The Tricksters or The Zen Tricksters) if you get the opportunity.

2) **Assembly of Dust** - Good overall. When they broke out into a jam it was a good sound, but when they were performing songs it was a bit too bluegrass-y for me. Technically/musically they were very good, just not my style. I'd check them out again if they were on a bill that I was going to see, but I wouldn't go out of my way.

3) **Keller Williams** - This was billed as Keller & The Keels, and I was looking forward to seeing Keller with more of a band structure. Unfortunately, the Keels flight was canceled and they couldn't get out of Colorado to get to the show. I was a little disappointed, but I love watching this guy play. Another solid Keller set. During his set he did Another Brick in the Wall, and that got me wondering on covers. I'd love to hear him do some Pearl Jam in his set. Maybe Porch or Elderly Woman. Bob Weir sat in with Keller to close out the set.

4) **Les Claypool** - I'm going to diverge here a bit from what was popular opinion at the festival. I don't understand for a moment why anyone thinks putting a microphone in front of this guy is a good idea, or on what basis he can carry a whole set as a solo act. The guy is an amazing bassist, no doubt... but man I couldn't wait for his set to be over. Even halfway through his set, when members of Ratdog started slowly filing in it was painful whenever he opened his mouth. And there's something about the sight of Les playing with Bobby while Les is wearing the pig mask that sits kind of funny with me. They closed out the set with most of Ratdog on stage playing Tomorrow Never Knows. Musically it was an amazing rendition. And while I don't think it's a song that's easily sung, why would you willingly let Claypool murder the vocals?

5) **Ratdog** - Man, these guys are quickly becoming one of my favorite live acts to see. They sounded great here with much better balance than at Summerstage, and Steve Kimock definitely seemed more in the groove on this show than when I saw him with the band last month. Donna Jean Godchaux came out early in the set to sing Shakedown Street and Keller came out on Eyes of the World. We left at the break and missed what I heard was a great second set, but after the drive up and a long day we were pretty tired (and April didn't have the benefit of the beer energy I was running on). April really enjoyed the set and we're both looking forward to seeing them again. Often.

Overall, a ton of fun. Looking forward to next year. Maybe I can convince April to camp next time. Probably not....