



The Voodoo Fest Casts a Merry Spell on New Orleans

By Michelle White

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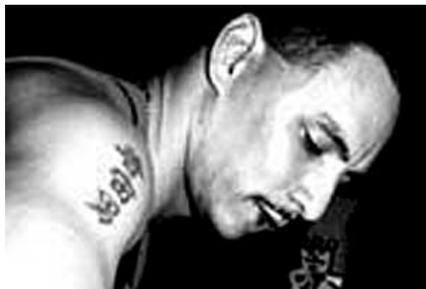


The Bamboula Stage.

The Voodoo Fest. For the Angelenos readers, lest this conjure visions of mysterious old women sitting around cackling over pins and dolls, it's not quite how it sounds. No dolls needed here, except perhaps a few giant - and I mean giant - scarecrows. And that multi-armed figure next to the Bamboula Stage. But hey, it is October. Halloween is fast approaching of course, New Orleans needs no excuse for such curiosities. So, the other ingredients for the potion: a little Southern Comfort (most appropriate), a hearty dose of pleasant weather, a sprawling, tree-lined venue traversed by a bayou, an enthusiastic and nicely navigable crowd, and oh yeah - a stellar lineup of musicians spanning the spectrum of genres. The result: the magical Voodoo Music Experience of 2004.

October 16-17, 2004 was one huge weekend in the Big Easy. Thousands of music fans flocked to New Orleans, escaping to a spacious park to roam freely amidst a funky crowd, hear artists grace five different stages, and savor the overall experience that is the Voodoo Fest, now rocking its sixth year. The aforementioned scarecrows and other striking decorations lent a NOLA flavor, while moss-covered trees provided evidence that we were in the lovely south. Perfectly comfortable temperatures and scattered clouds painting the skies rounded out a feel-good weekend.

The music began at roughly 11:00 am on Saturday and Sunday. Well-organized performances rotated so that the overlap was as minimal as possible, an important issue to consider with multi-stage, multi-day music festivals. This year featured Voodoo's first-ever resident DJ, Los Angeles-based DJ Medi4, spinning a multi-genre mix during set changes on the main stage. Also, performances on the Bamboche and Bamboula Stages, those across the creek, ended by 7:00 pm each night to allow the audience more flexibility to migrate to the main stage in the Meadow to catch performances by headlining acts.



Mix Master Mike

Saturday featured Juliette and the Licks, the band of Juliette Lewis, who has proven herself as vibrant on a big stage full of musicians as she is on the big screen. Following in the Avalou Warehouse was Irish

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favorite The Thrills with their taste for the lighter side of the country-rock/'70s pop-rock spectrum. Later, as the sun played brilliant colors upon the southern sky before fading away, Mix Master Mike took the stage, delivering a thumping performance to green lasers punctuating the darkening evening. His up-tempo beats and artful scratches inspired plenty of movement from the crowd. Elsewhere at the Bamboula Stage, Talib Kweli maintained a sea of raised arms, firing up his crowd with the call and response technique and also providing enthusiastic hip-hop fans with an encore. Across the way at the Bamboche Stage, Cypress Hill treated fans to hits old and new alike.



Sonic Youth



Green Day

The main stage, Gris Gris in the Meadow featured the hard rollicking sounds of Las Vegas band The Killers and the mature melodies and rocking guitars of Sonic Youth in the afternoon. The recently reunited Pixies performed in the evening, and at night came the headliners. Green Day played a lively set, performing popular singles such as "Hitchin' a Ride" and even the ubiquitous "Time of Your Life." At the conclusion of their set, they even created a spur-of-the moment band, drawing a drummer, bassist and guitarist up from the crowd onstage for a song, even allowing the guitar player to keep their guitar. The bass player received a less permanent memento of a launch into the crowd, but he seemed to enjoy it as well.



The Beastie Boys

The Beastie Boys closed out the night with a spirited show, solidifying their timelessness within their frontier of boisterous rock-rap. Jumping around in green warm-up suits, they appeared very much into their music, including older songs they've performed countless times. Rather than executing these by rote, they truly got into it which made for an invigorating and gratifying performance, encompassing favorites such as the classic "Sabotage" as well as "So Whatcha Want" and "Root Down." They only stooped to a couple political moments, making their liberal preference clear, but remaining more balanced than they have been known to in other shows, here just emphasizing the importance of voting in this election year, and keeping the music flowing. Their performance left fans eminently satisfied, ready to explore the bounds of New Orleans festivities and return for another day.



Season Finale

9:00 PM | Victory Lap Variety Show !

Wednesday May 21st

12:00 PM | Free LOST Exhibit at The Paley Center for Media in Beverly Hills, For a Limited Time Only!

7:30 PM | Tartuffe: South Coast Repertory Season Finale

8:00 PM | Surely Lorraine's Anime Wong at Malo's Silver Lake Sessions

Thursday May 22nd

12:00 PM | Free LOST Exhibit at The Paley Center for Media in Beverly Hills, For a Limited Time Only!

7:30 PM | Hovorostovsky @ LA Opera

8:00 PM | Tartuffe: South Coast Repertory Season Finale

9:30 PM | Comedy Palace

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De La Soul

On Sunday afternoon, those more partial to hip hop made a beeline for De La Soul at the Bamboula Stage, where the trio deviated from the festival's overall timeliness, beginning their set a half hour behind schedule. This also pushed back A Tribe Called Quest at the opposite Bamboche Stage, given the proximity and number of mutual fans. However, both acts were warmly received by the crowd. Both are Native Tongues groups, those rappers who elevated thoughtful, laidback, provocative lyricism and jazzy variety over the one-dimensionality of hardcore gangsta rap. In their rallying performance, De La made heavy use of the call & response technique, attempting to strike competition within the crowd, "party's over here - no party's over here" and pitting the ladies against the fellas. They announced their new album, *The Grind Date*, and played brand new songs off this latest LP as well as tracks from 1988 when they first gained public notice. The infectious urgency of their rapping, almost reminiscent of Tupac, ignited the crowd. A similarly strong Tribe Called Quest performance pleased fans thrilled to see them reunited.

Elsewhere, the afternoon featured local New Orleans band Cowboy Mouth and their catchy country-rock sounds on the main stage. Velvet Revolver carried the party through the evening. This group, encompassing veterans of Stone Temple Pilots and Guns N' Roses, rocked earth-shaking riffs and urgent epic songs, naturally proving their musical roots but also the forward-thinking freshness of this unlikely union. Last but certainly not least, Kid Rock's raucous performance finished the Gris Gris Stage out for the night, the weekend, and for Voodoo 2004.

This year's Voodoo crowd seemed predominantly younger, geared toward twentysomethings and thirtysomethings with a good amount of teenagers present as well. Most seemed inclined toward hip hop or rock as opposed to electronic music, especially judging by the small crowd drawn by the experimental mix of late addition BT, who performed in the Avalou warehouse Sunday evening. Of course, stumbling onto a small crowd can be a welcome relief to anyone accustomed to fighting their way through people to get any view of their revered artist. Here overall mobility was a refreshingly easy task. And there was plenty present to amuse the senses along the way. Various clothes, accessories, and art was available for sale, or there was the option of taking a breather along the bridge dividing the Meadow from the Island and observing the skies reflected in the water. The various amenities, some certainly unique to the south, made for a thoroughly engrossing festival.



The bridge spanning the Meadow and the Island.

The food was also a welcome reminder we were in the south. What other music festival encompasses southern favorites such as red beans and rice, jambalaya, and crawfish etouffee? Other options of note included vegan food and Mexican food. Sponsors Miller Lite and Southern Comfort provided beer and Hurricanes to all thirsty music fans.



A view off the bridge.

The uniqueness of the Voodoo Fest combines the singular southern lure of New Orleans, a beautiful

natural setting, and artists who, whether having gained popularity on the radio or through a larger underground following, are solid performers. The best part of a multi-day festival can be the surprises - stumbling upon bands you didn't know, or didn't know you knew, sets that perfectly fit your mood And the Voodoo Fest offered different types of music for all musical palates, making for quite the enchanting experience.

For more information, check out www.voodooomusicfest.com.

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