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DRIVE TO SURVIVE

Special 8 page liftout program in centre pages

More room to move at bluesfest

Mandy Nolan

After 12 years at Red Devil Football Grounds, Bluesfest returns to Belongil Fields. Festival director Peter Noble, is looking forward to a festival where people can stretch out and enjoy the contours of a much larger site.

'It's really three separate fields with a tree line between each field, so with the setup we have you get a sense of it being three different festivals. The site is 28 acres, when you consider that Red Devils was 8 acres that's a big difference.'

The move to a new site was all about giving punters a more comfortable and enjoyable festival experience.

'When we first moved to the rugby ground we weren't as popular as we are now, people used to come and go more, it would be full for a couple of hours and then the numbers would go down again, but for the last couple of festivals, people just came and stayed and it was a bit of a quandary, do you stay on a site where it's successful or do you move to somewhere that will accommodate people better? You wouldn't expect to go to Woodford and not have anywhere to sit down.'

The sheer size of the site means that audiences are going to have the freedom to move around more easily. 'Friday, Saturday and Sunday we are expecting numbers of around 16,000 or 17,000 people, but Thursday and Monday will be a bit quieter [because of the delay in school holidays until two weeks after Easter]. It will feel like a real locals festival again.'

If you are attending Bluesfest it would be advisable to wear comfortable footwear as getting between stages is going to involve a bit of footwork.

'You will have to get a bit mobile this year, but the sound bleed that used to happen at The Crossroads won't be occurring this year. When you walk in this year, there's the Apex stage, then the main field is Jambalaya, and then in the wooded area is the Juke Joint... we have had to put up a lot of fencing – every area of Bulwinna has been fenced off.'

The Bluesfest continued to show why they were the recipients of the Green Festival Award this year by erecting the Mojo tent this year with a tree smack bang in the middle.

'The trees were there before we came in, so it seemed wrong to take them out.'

The Bluesfest has always had an enormous community energy, brought about partly by the enormous number of volunteers who help out on the event, just to be part of the atmosphere.

'We had 1250 applicants for volunteering this year – I think we use around 800 to 900 of those. There's people like Bruce the Pixie – he's into the recycling arena, by mid festival he has got people doing impromptu plays within the site, around the recycling programs. Volunteers get into areas that you wouldn't think they'd would want to get involved in like garbage collection – and you realise it's not just about putting out bins, it's about developing a collective awareness around recycling.

'We are not a carbon neutral event, to say that you are is to draw a bit of a long bow, but we do encourage to recycle and share rides to the festival, we do try to do the right thing, like having bamboo plates and plantation timber lanyards and forks, no plastic bags... we've been doing it for over a decade now.'

But punters don't come for the recycling. They come for the program. As the bloke who spends most of his year travelling to spots all over the globe booking the acts, he's very proud of 2008's line up.

'People are saying that it is the deepest program, so many bands like Stanley Clarke and George Duke and people like that, then there's GOCOO & Gero the mainly female Taiko drum group. A lot of these people haven't been mentioned so far because of how much there is to get out there – there's Eskimo Joe doing their show this year with violins as a special part of a symphony orchestra, Kacey Chambers with a covers band. People see stuff at Bluesfest that they didn't know was happening.'

For Peter Noble it's the complete immersion in music that sets Bluesfest apart.

'It's the best from the very first band to the last. The very best shows are often in the afternoon. Some of the artists playing between 12, 3 & 4 are some of the best shows you'll see. If you don't come early you will miss people like Loudon Wainwright III or Michelle Shocked. That's what makes Bluesfest, it's what sets it apart, it's great right from the beginning.'

The Cat Empire will be back again this year to get the punters up and dancing.

The early bird gets the word

The festival fever continues. Early Bird three day passes and kid's passes at discounted prices for the annual Byron Bay Writers Festival will be available from Friday March 21.

Tickets can be purchased online at www.byronbaywritersfestival.com and the Jonat Byron Bay staff will be waiting to take calls after Easter on 6685 6262. 'Tickets are expected to be in huge demand,' say organisers.

'It's too early to reveal the names involved, but we can tell you that this is a bumper year for Australian fiction and you can expect to meet the new young faces of literature amid the household heroes and famous faces.'

BEE READY

While recovering from the effects of celebrating the risen god, the blues festival, and ingestion of too many chocolate rabbit ears, the Echo drudges will still be required to open up shop and be as busy as bees on Easter Monday March 24, so you will be able to get your classified ads in by the usual deadlines for that day. However, both our offices will be closed on Good Friday March 21, so if you're thinking of disappearing into an alternative universe for the long weekend, honey, it would be wise to get your advertising and editorial copy in the previous Thursday. Sweet.

BLUESFEST

BYRON BAY EAST COAST BLUES & ROOTS MUSIC FESTIVAL 2008

Friday

She's the bird headed girl we all grew to love with the Audrey Hepburn eyes, the 18 hole high Doc Martens and the chilling voice that declared its heartbreak in 'Nothing Compares to You.' If you had a breakup in the eighties, that was the soundtrack. **Sinead O'Connor** is one of the eagerly awaited acts playing the Mojo stage on Friday. O'Connor's time as singer for Ton Ton Macoute brought her to the attention of the music industry. She produced her first album at just 20 years old and about 7 months pregnant. She was praised for her voice and her original songs. She was also noted for her appearance: her shaved head, angry expression, and sometimes shapeless or unusual clothing. *The Lion and the Cobra* was not embraced by the mainstream on a large-scale basis, but the album did eventually hit gold rated status and earned a Best Female Rock Vocal Performance Grammy nomination. It was her album, *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* that contained her international breakthrough hit 'Nothing Compares 2 U', a song written by Prince and originally recorded and released by a side project of his. Aided by a memorable and well received video which solely consisted of her face as she sang the song, it became a massive international hit.
Also featured on Friday is the legendary **Loudon Wainwright III**. A singer, songwriter and actor, Wainwright's long list of accomplishments includes two Grammy nominations for the albums *I'm Alright* (1993) and *More Love Songs* (1998), and a cover by Johnny Cash of his song 'The Man Who Couldn't Cry' for Cash's highly acclaimed 1994 album *American Recordings*. Wainwright's latest album, *Strange Weather: Music From and Inspired by the Film Knocked Up*, was released in 2007.
Wainwright has also been hailed by MOJO Magazine as 'one of America's most astute lyrical commentators... lyrically compelling and emotionally overpowering.'
Another punter's pick for Friday is **Seasick Steve**. Leaving home at 13 years old with only a few clothes, a sleeping bag and his guitar, Steve wouldn't hit the streets alone – going hungry, working for handouts, freight hopping across the States and playing for food. After years on the road, Steve made the move to Norway where he released his first album *Cheap* in 2004 with the Level Devils, followed by *Dog House Music* in 2006 and his first UK television appearance on Jools Holland's Annual Hootenanny Broadcast on New Year's Eve. One BBC review said of Steve: 'His bare-bone blues is simple, tight and full of authentic roots spirit. As talented as Seasick Steve is, he remains as humble and as unaffected as the boy who left home at 13. 'I don't trying to be on some dusty shelf in the blues section under S. I don't even think of myself as an blues person, more like a song and dance kinda fella,' he says. 'I just like letting the people who come and see me figure it out.' Voted by Mojo as breakthrough artist of the year for 2007.

MOJO STAGE

10.30pm Eskimo Joe
9.00pm Galactic ft Chali 2NA & Roots Riley
7.15pm Sinead O'Connor
6.45pm Ron Sexsmith
4.30pm Seasick Steve
3.15pm Michelle Shocked
2.00pm Loudon Wainwright III
1.00pm Damien Dempsey
12.15pm Jake Shimabukuro

CROSSROADS STAGE

10.30pm Ray Davies
9.00pm Don McLean
7.30pm Ian Brown
6.00pm Stanley Clarke / Dukes Project
4.30pm Lee Ritenour
3.15pm Jason Mraz
2.00pm Sugarland
12.45pm Garb Lund
12 noon The Last Town Chorus

JAMBALAYA STAGE

10.15pm Jon Cleary
8.30 pm Charlie Musselwhite
6.45pm Mavis Staples
5.15pm John Hammond
3.45pm Jeff Lang
2.15pm Music Maker Relief Foundation
1.15pm Music Maker Relief Foundation
12 noon Raul Midon

APRA STAGE

10.30pm Johnny Green's Blues Cowboys
9.00pm Johnny Gray's Rockinitis
7.30pm eMDee
6.00pm Worldfly
4.30pm Leah Flanagan
3.00pm Hayley Sales
2.00pm Mamadou Diabate
1.00pm Lucy Wainwright Roche
12.00pm Amali Ward

THE JUKE JOINT STAGE

10.00pm Hat Fitz & Itchy
8.30pm Juzzie Smith
7.00pm Jason Lowe
5.30pm Mongrels of Passion / Vince
4.00pm Jess Clements

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Opening Night
Wed 19th March 6pm
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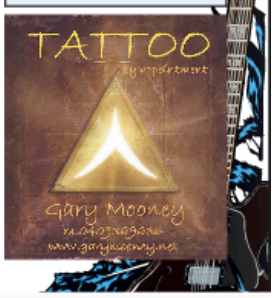
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