

A festival for people who don't like festivals

By **Dane Smith** on 09/28/2010 07:01 PM



There's no shortage of festivals in and around Asheville. Between high-profile events like Bele Chere, LAAFF, Goombay and LEAF, it seems like the region's music and art has more than enough opportunities to gather and celebrate their creative pursuits. But those summer staples tend to host bigger names, with some of Asheville's most interesting and progressive acts falling to the wayside.

Enter Drone Valley Music and Art Festival, a two-day showcase of local independent and underground talent hosted at the Grove House and West Asheville's latest dive, The Get Down.

Now in its fourth year, the festival is designed not only to offer an outlet for up-and-coming bands to perform, says Drone Valley founder and Balloon Wars drummer Andy Meier, but also to strengthen ties and encourage show-swapping and community between those artists.

"It definitely opens up some doors," he says. "I'd say most shows you've got three or four bands playing together. They may talk, they may not, but it's definitely encouraged. We usually have a backstage where the artists can meet up beforehand just to connect, talk things out and see what everyone's been up to lately."

This year's lineup includes a diverse offering of local and regional rock sensibilities from the frenetic, fuzz-laden Forty Furies, Blag'ard and Hammer No More the Fingers, to the jazzy indie pop of Grammer School and the sparse, Pavement-esque dissonance of the Machiavillains. Meier affectionately refers to Drone Valley as a "hodgepodge" and says he designed the event to be a "musical collective." So if these bands seem like a strange fit for one bill, well, that's kind of the point.

"We have such a wide variety of independent sounds coming out of this area," says co-organizer and Machiavillains bassist/vocalist Patrick Willse. "I feel that it needs to be

represented, and this is the perfect way to do it. We have a bunch of different bands with completely different sounds, and I think it's great."

In addition to the music, Drone Valley will also host a variety of visual and performance art, which Meier added in hopes of attracting atypical festival goers. Patrons can break from the bands to observe live painting, video installations, a contortion act by the Great Yandini and stand-up comedy by Vinnie the Creep, who promises to be a show himself.

"Vinnie the Creep is more of a freak show with comedy mixed in," Meier explains with a grin. "He hangs stuff from his piercings and he does a little contortion, and he mixes comedy in with it and talks a little trash to the crowd. He's going to MC between some of the shows."

"He also crawls through a 14" drum shell," Willse says. "It's fun to watch."

The performance pieces, both Meier and Willse agree, add an element of spontaneity that in the past has produced some of the most memorable Drone Valley moments. Last year, one of the artists hosted an interactive project, eventually selling the completed painting at the end of the night, complete with some unusual signatures.

"Like 10 of us took our shirts off, men and women," recalls Meier, "and dipped our chests right in the red paint, and then pressed them up on the back of the canvas to sign it with our nipples."

And that, says Meier's younger brother and Balloon Wars bassist Niq Meier, is a perfect example of the surprises Drone Valley has to offer. "Even if it's not planned," he says enthusiastically, "we're going to have fun."

The younger Meier should know. He's been at the festival every year, traveling nearly 20 hours from upstate Michigan just for the event. And even though the drive is miserable, he says Drone Valley more than justifies the discomfort.

"There were three of us in a Blazer," he remembers of one especially arduous trip. "We had a little makeshift couch in the back, and by the time we got to Corbin, Ky., it was

like a marinating sweatbox in there. It was bad. But it was worth it.

“I look forward to Drone Valley because you know it’s not going to be overdone. There aren’t so many sponsors that you can’t hear the music over the Verizon commercials or something. It’s like a festival for people who don’t like to go to festivals.”

Two nights, three venues, \$5 each

Friday, Oct. 1

9:30 p.m. @ The Boiler Room

Grammer School

Forty Furies

Jaspers

with contortion, live painting, projection video and local art displays

9:30 p.m. @ The Get Down

Blag'ard, Balloon Wars, Machiavillains

with live art and more

Saturday, Oct. 2

9:30 p.m. @ The Boiler Room

Hammer No More the Fingers, Where the Buffalo Roamed, Blag'ard, Bobby White, True Believers

with live painting, freak shows, local art displays and projection video displays

9 p.m. @ Eleven on Grove

Balloon Wars, Mikingmihrab, Solito, Flowers of Takai

with DJ sets, local art displays, freak show and comedy between bands

9:30 p.m. @ The Get Down

Pallas Cats, Pleasures of the Ultraviolet

with live painting and local art displays

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