

UpstateLIVE

NEW YORK STATE MUSIC GUIDE

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 6 (#27)

AUGUST 2011



DAN FISK



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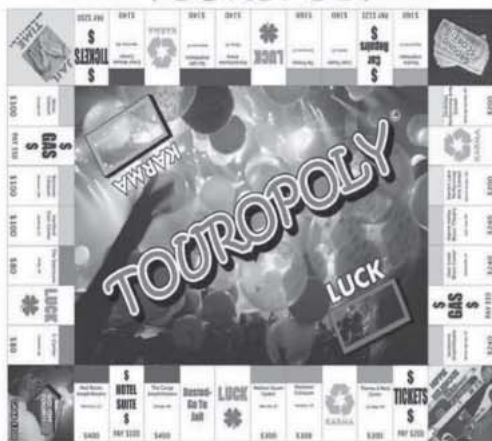
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BEHIND THE WHEEL

WITH HERBYONE

Welcome to the August issue of UpstateLIVE. The past 2 months have been incredible, I can't remember a summer with more memorable moments! But the next 2 months are equally as impressive, as outdoor festivals and concerts continue through the end of September in most areas. Here's a look at a few events on the horizon for August.

The Saranac Concert series concludes with a bang, as Robert Randolph and the Family Band return for another show at the brewery on Friday August 5th. If you haven't seen this incredible band I say now is the time, RR will blow your mind, playing the peddle steel to new heights.

The fine folks at Middle Ages Brewing in Syracuse hold their annual free summer concert on Sunday August 7th in Leavenworth Park. Headliners New Riders of the Purple Sage join Dark Hollow, Packway Handle Band, Sirsy, Animal Pants and The Dig. For more info visit www.middleagesbrewing.com

The following week the 3rd annual Live Free Festival in Worth Center, NY (near Adams) will take place, headlined by the incredible Assembly of Dust. Former Strangefolk front man Reid Genauer leads this great band from the northeast. Other notable acts include The Niche, The Townies, The Garcia Project, and Free Grass Union.

The following week is UpstateLIVE's very own event, the 2nd annual Upstate Boogie. This 2 day and night musical campout will take place in Marion, NY (about 20 miles east of Rochester). Leading the way are Subsoil, Thousands of One, and Aqueous on Friday, and Thunderbody, Hot Day at the Zoo, Mosaic Foundation, Audioinflux and House on a Spring on Saturday. For more info visit the website www.UpstateBoogie.com

The last week of August will take me back to Hunter Mountain, and the inaugural Bluestock Music Festival August 26th-28th. WDST has once again brought in some heavy hitters, as Greg Allman, Buddy Guy, and Elvin Bishop highlight this 3 day, 22 band event. For info visit the website www.bluestock.com

And finally, as September rolls in, we will once again be headed to moe.hawk, NY and the 12th annual moedown September 2nd-4th. This years lineup is jam packed, including a return visit from The Levon Helm Band, with special guest Bob Weir!! Other acts include Bruce Hornsby and the Noisemakers, Railroad Earth, Ween, TV on the Radio, and many more. For complete moedown information visit www.moedown.com

Have a great August everyone, I'll see you at the shows!!
Peace - herby one

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NOTES FROM THE EDGE

BY ERIK JENSEN

+INNER VIEW+

DAN FISK

Dan Fisk is a native of Seneca Falls, NY. Over the years, he has developed his songwriting craft and has received acclaim regionally for his work. Now nestled in the Virginia landscape that borders nearby Washington, D.C., his stock has risen to incredible heights. With the release of his first solo effort, "Bruises From The Backseat," this magnificent talent is being introduced to the masses on a national scale. I caught up with my old friend recently to talk about his career, and all of the exciting things that are coming to fruition for him.

Erik Jensen: *Being someone that grew up around you, I was always curious how you were introduced to the musical bug. What started that fire?*

Dan Fisk: I wanted to play an instrument for as far back as I remember. When I was approaching my 8th birthday, my mother gave me the option to start playing guitar or drums. She only gave me those two choices. I remember thinking long and hard about it. Then my Great Aunt made the decision for me by giving me a guitar for my First Communion. I guess I was a bit rebellious, because I remember whining to my mother that now I was forced to play guitar, and it no longer was my choice! What a brat I was. But I instantly loved the guitar. My grandmother was kind enough to pay for lessons off and on for the next 8 years. I say "off and on" because it seemed every other year I would stop taking lessons to focus on sports. Then eventually get the itch again. It was a wonderful cycle.

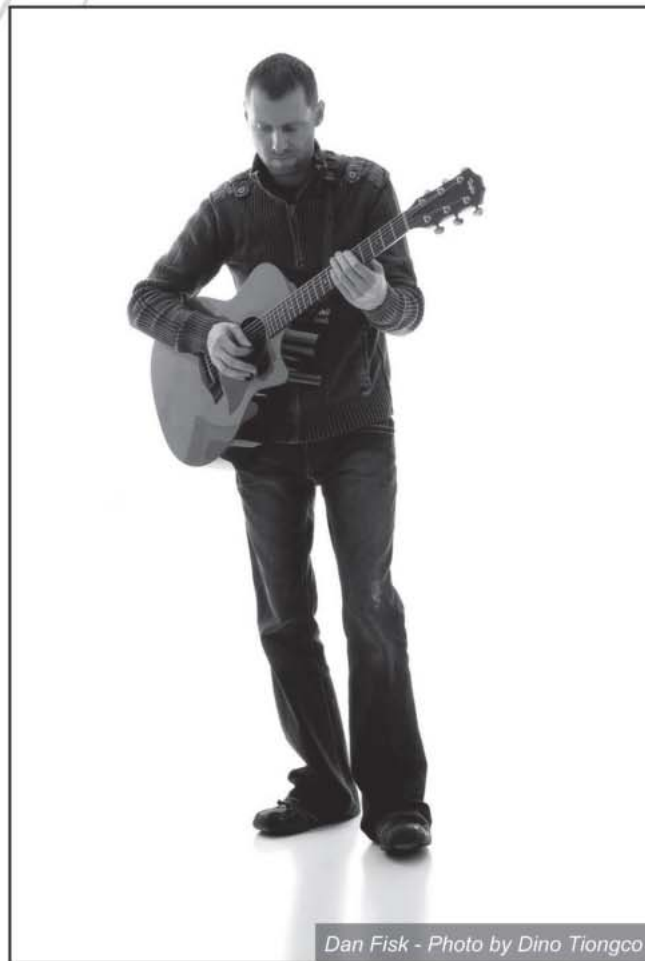
EJ: *Who were your biggest musical influences growing up? And who are you fond of in today's music scene???*

DF: I don't think my musical tastes have evolved very much over the course of my life. The music I loved as a kid still influence me today. James Taylor. John Mellancamp. Paul Simon. Bob Dylan. Crosby, Stills and Nash. Anything that had a sweet sounding acoustic guitar was like crack to me. Then in 1995, I heard a song on the radio that changed my musical perspective. Sorry if that sounds a bit over-dramatic, but I knew it was significant. "What Would You Say" by Dave Matthews Band came on my car stereo as I was driving around taking photos for a high school art project. I flipped. I'd never heard anything before that I liked THAT much. So for better or worse, I spent the better part of the next 5 years absorbing all I could from DMB. The way he played guitar was exactly how I tried to play guitar. It wasn't flashy, but it was super percussive and rhythmic. I loved his ability to intricately mute strings with both hands, allowing him to strum like an angry gorilla but only have the listener hear the notes he wants you to. Being so focused on Dave Matthews helped develop my sound for sure. But eventually I hit a wall, and

realized that I needed to broaden my horizons. Something I am still trying to do. I've since worked hard to develop my own approach to the acoustic guitar. Hopefully it will always be evolving and improving.

EJ: *Obviously, you moved out of the area many years ago? What prompted the move down to the DC area, and how did you get involved with your first projects down there?*

DF: I never really played with a band until I moved to Virginia. Nearly all my solo shows in college were from a regular weekly gig at a local bar that really just let me set up and play for free drinks because they knew all my friends would show up. After I moved down south, I put an ad in the paper looking for bandmates. I soon hooked up with Mike Carlisle, whom I have played with ever since. After a couple short term bass players, we found John Jens. The three of us played together for about 7 years. This past February was our last show under the name "Knockout Mouse" (KM). Even though we released a full album of original songs I wrote in 2008, the band played mostly cover bars. I would play a few solo shows during those years, but my musical life pretty much circled around a few gigs a month with KM. My college degree is in Wildlife Management. I moved to Virginia (just outside of DC) to work for a great environmental consulting company (Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc.), however I also chose



Dan Fisk - Photo by Dino Tiongo

this area partially because I thought it was a bit of hot bed for acoustic pop. Dave Matthews, Jason Mraz, Pat McGee and many others sprung up from this region of the country, and I guess I was hoping to follow in their footsteps. As I eventually found out, DC isn't exactly Nashville. But there are a lot of very talented musicians and great studios here, and collectively we are all trying to improve the scene.

EJ: You have acquired a vast array of acclaim down there with your work in Knockout Mouse? When did you realize that you wanted to start gigging out regularly in the solo vein? I mean, obviously, it was something you had done plenty of, but what set the wheels in motion?

DF: I'm not sure I would use the word "acclaim", but we certainly played at a lot of clubs and met a lot of people! Playing cover gigs with the band all those years taught me a lot of valuable lessons. It made me a better performer for sure and introduced me to the music scene. But a couple years back I realized that if I was ever going to truly make music a career playing my own songs, I needed to cut back my day job, write more original music and unfortunately cut back on full band cover gigs. So I talked my boss into letting me work just a day or two a week, and I spend the rest of the week writing, recording, marketing, promoting, etc. I also still play about 2-3 solo cover gigs per week to help pay the bills. You pretty much have to play solo if you plan on making any money. There just isn't enough money to go around playing with a full band. I play about 1 or 2 all original shows in the area per month. These are the gigs I live for. They don't pay well, but it's the ones that gets my name out there, the ones that I truly connect with music fans, the ones I can sell CDs at and the ones I need to do more of up and down the east coast.

EJ: "Bruises From The Backseat," is quite an accomplishment Dan. You shift so effortlessly in musical direction and focus from track to track? Tell me a little about the recording process of this CD, and the guests that are on this piece?

DF: Well, on Sight Lines (the full length Knockout Mouse album) I felt that there wasn't quite enough musical diversity. Recording Bruises From The Backseat as a solo EP, I really wanted to have a variety of sounds and special guests to keep the listener on his toes. Even though I farmed out the mixing and mastering work to big studios, I did all of the recording in my home studio, so time was on my side. It's not a coincidence that you can hear acoustic pop on the EP, followed by some country, bookended with bluegrass, with a bit of acoustic funk stuffed in there somewhere. I have always been a bit self-conscious that I'm not diverse enough. Having limited funds, microphones, high end guitars, preamps, etc., available to record with - I knew I had to work hard to create sonic diversity. "A Thousand Love Songs" was a song I wrote a couple years back that people seem to really love. I am obsessed with the sound of a piano (but can't even play chopsticks), so I was happy to have James McGoff lend his talent for some backing keys. He's only 20 years old, but already a great player. John Jens (bass player for Knockout Mouse) played on this track, as well as several others. I also wanted to have a track that had a distinct bluegrass sound. So I wrote this little song (Life

and Limb) that was a tip-of-the-hat to my love of simple bluegrass and great harmonies. I knew a few banjo and mandolin players, so they stopped by my studio for an evening and I hit the record button. David Lester played standup bass on it (including the bowed part in the middle that sounds like a deep violin). I had never met him before he walked in my studio, but was blown away by his musical ability and knowledge. "Stranded in a Limousine" was a long lost Paul Simon song that I loved so much I just had to cover. Nobody (and I mean NOBODY) is familiar with this song. I probably could of gotten away with not even buying the rights to use it! The version I came up with was a bit dirty and funky, I wanted an equally dirty harmonica solo in it. Enter Ted Garber, an amazing local DC musician friend of mine and great harp player. His latest CD is always in my truck. Another significant musical guest on the EP was Katie Chambers. She played cello on Part of You II. I found her through a friend and have since become a big fan of her skill on that beautiful instrument. She plays all over the region, and I was super excited when she agreed to play with me.

EJ: I know you have not been up here to play many shows in recent memory? How does it feel coming home to play and what does it mean to come back and do an event like the Park Ave. Festival.

DF: I love coming back to NY. I have played in NYC a couple times, as well as Saratoga Springs, Oneonta, Rochester and my hometown of Seneca Falls. Coming back for a show is always a great excuse to make the 7 hour drive and I get to make it a long weekend to visit friends and family. It's cool having a hometown crowd so far from what I now call home. Many old high school and college friends come out and are really supportive of my music. As for Park Ave Fest, I am really happy to be a part of it this year. I haven't been to the festival since I was in college and have always thought it would be great to come back and play. I'm really looking forward to it. I'll be playing on the Oxford Stage on Sunday, Aug. 7th at 4:15. I believe I am the last performer on that stage, hopefully that means they saved the best for last ;)

EJ: Do you have any more projects in store on a recording level? Are you still working with the band???

DF: I'm always juggling a thousand random projects. Currently, I have a large handful of songs that are nearly complete. I'm actually headed to Cobleskill, NY to co-write some songs with Sam Whedon in late July, which will hopefully then be recorded back in VA later this summer. Although he is at his NY home for the summer, he lives in LA, and played some lead guitar on my first album. I do still work with Mike and John from Knockout Mouse. They come by my studio nearly every week to jam, flesh out new songs and most importantly have a few beers. The three of us are very close. I talk to Mike on the phone nearly every day. I play duo shows on occasion with one or the other. And even as I try to seek out new musicians to play with, those guys are never far from me.

EJ: Are you going to take the show out on the road more frequently? With this album as a catalyst, is that something you see yourself doing more regularly?

DF: Releasing *Bruises From The Backseat* was a huge step for me and certainly has given me something to push at my shows. I have done mini-tours, playing in MD, Philly, NYC, etc., but have yet to seriously hit the road. If the next couple months prove to be productive and I can write a slew of new songs, I would feel better about spending the time/money/energy it takes to go on the road. Until then, I just feel that writing takes precedence over touring. Hopefully by year's end I will feel a little bit better about putting the miles on my truck and eating McDonalds for three weeks straight.

EJ: What do you miss the most about Upstate New York???

DF: Water. Without a doubt, I miss the lakes. Virginia doesn't have anything even remotely close to the bodies of water that NY has. I didn't realize or appreciate this fully until I moved away, but every time I come back to NY now, I am reminded how beautiful it is.

[Words by Erik Jensen, Photo by Dino Tiongo]

+FESTIVALS+

NORTH FORK MUSIC PARK THE WEEKEND OFF 3 AND SLY FEST 6

If you have not been to North Fork Music Park for a festival or event, you have truly missed out. This quaint property located in Warsaw was one of the best kept secrets in the New York Festival circuit. After last year however, the word is out....officially! Your hosts, Tope and Harry Nourse have one of the great un-tapped properties in New York. On this property you can camp in many different conditions including a secluded wooded area. They have a pond that you can swim in that has lifeguards on duty during the events. During shows they have one of the best in-house bakeries ever assembled at any festival. I have not even mentioned the music festivities yet. This year, two of the better known events to take place on the property, return for another installment. You should get down to Warsaw to check out The Weekend Off 3 and Sly Fest 6.

THE WEEKEND OFF 3 - 8/5-6/2011

Joe Urge Productions is bringing back the good tunes and great vibes for year number three of this festival. This year, they have raised the bar with the addition of two great national recording artists. The legendary Keller Williams will be headlining the festivities this year. When I heard the announcement that Mr. Williams was going to be playing this show, I was quite impressed. Vibesquad being on the bill is also great news. If you have never seen these guys, you are in for a real treat. Other great acts on the bill include Jimkata, Consider The Source, Dopapod, Slip Madigan, Timbre Coup, Audio-Influx, House On A Spring, Aqueous, and others.

The late night events consist of various DJ's and other acts that are electronically inclined. These events will be hosted by Petsheads. Some of the acts include Skanntron, Big Basha,



Keller Williams - Photo by Steve Moyles

Wax Combat, and 3PO. For more information on the event, check out www.joeurge.com or www.northfork-ny.com.

SLY FEST 6 - 8/26-28/2011

Presented by The Slyboots School of Music and Art, Sly Fest is back for year number 6. This is another one that is sure to be electric. I think it is best summed up by the post on their Facebook page. It states, "SLYFEST is our way of giving back to the music community and culture that offers us so much." We've all learned a lot from past experiences and each SlyFest gets better than the last! Besides the finest music, arts and camping in the Upstate New York area and beyond— you'll find (and help create) a great atmosphere and a great crowd of music-loving individuals that have become such a trademark aspect of the SLYFEST experience. This year's SlyFest promises a wide array of foods, music, paintings, sculptures, puppets, projections, interactive music and art workshops, fire dancing, hula-hooping, hot air balloons, swimming, hiking, YOGA, hand made clothing, accessories, crafts, and everything else you'd hope to find.

Of course your host band here is none other than, On The Sly! Other acts on the bill for the weekend include the incredible Surprise Me Mr. Davis, which features members of The Slip. Also check out One World Tribe, Sophistafunk, Roots Collider, Jony James Blues Band, The Manhattan Project, Subsoil, AudioInflux, Driftwood, Atom Hadm and many others. Blind Baby's Holiday will also be represented here as well. Brian and the gang have teamed up with Slyfest to bring some of the vibe and music to North Fork after the untimely closing of his host park. All in all, it should be a great time to rage. Being that I am right up the road in Hamlin, I will definitely make this one of my stops at the end of the summer.

For more info on this event check out www.onthesly.org or www.northfork-ny.com.

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BELLA TERRA MUSIC FESTIVAL

8/18-21/2011 - GARDNER'S FARM -
STEPHENTOWN, NY

This is year number three of this great music festival located between Albany and the Berkshires in lovely Stephentown. Like most festivals, it is an "outdoor music and arts event that occurs over multiple days and nights featuring several stages of performances, artists and other programming." The homepage for the event issued a statement that explains what the real mission of this event is. It reads, "Bella Terra celebrates a positive and progressive outlook and lifestyle, grassroots organization and activism, consciousness and creativity, self expression through artistic mediums, and the pursuit of a holistic existence that balances body, mind & spirit. Music and art can be a great platform to promote awareness, consciousness and sustainability and unite a people to affect societal progress." Bella Terra Festival uses this platform to call attention to the need to reestablish a spiritual connection between mankind and the Earth and perpetuate an ideology of global unification. Bella Terra Festival recognizes that changing one's own life for the better goes hand in hand with improving the world around us. This is why Bella Terra advocates that each person pursue his or her own dreams, open their minds and realize their maximum potential. To help meet these ends at Bella Terra Festival, many classes, workshops, lectures in music, art, nature, politics and beyond are offered, in addition to a host of other programs and entertainment to help deliver our message."

The festival was started in 2009 as a benefit to raise funds for the Berkshire Arts Scholarships. This money provides scholarships to disadvantaged youths in Western Massachusetts between the age of 16 and 25, who wish to pursue career paths in the Arts. A noble cause for sure!

This year's musical line-up is quite diverse and eclectic on many levels. The festival will be headlined by the king of shred himself, Buckethead. You may remember his work with Guns N' Roses, Les Claypool and as a renowned session player. And I am sure his appearance may have compounded your memory as well. Buckethead wears a KFC bucket or a mask on his head at all times. In any case, you will not see many guitarists of this caliber on a regular basis. The Mickey Hart Band is also on the bill for all of us loyal Deadheads to cherish. Any performance by Mr. Hart is quite uplifting and full of energy. Expect no different this time around! Speaking of the Dead, The Donna Jean Godchaux Band and Tom Constanten will also be performing. I would think there is a good chance that a collaboration may be in order. Wes n' Worrell featuring Bernie Worrell of P-Funk and the Talking Heads fame will be rocking the stage too. Expect a dance marathon during this set! Other great acts that weekend include Zach Deputy, Rubblebucket, Hot Buttered Rum, Emancipator, Zion I, Roots of Creation, The Bridge, Dopapod, The Rev. Tor Band, and Heyoka. Of course, there are many, many more great bands on the bill. To get the full line-up, check out www.bellaterrafestival.com.

Although there is an abundance of fantastic music on tap for the weekend, make sure to check out all of the other great things taking place. Between art, workshops, lectures, and other assorted happenings, there will be many things to take in, and feed your head with. Check it out! This festival looks like it is going to be a blast.

BACKWOODS PONDFEST

9/9-10/2011 - TWIN PONDS CAMPSITE - PERU, NY

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to the North Country! Located a few miles from the Canadian border, the Backwoods Pondfest is back for another year of great vibes and even greater music. This festival is the brainchild of the great North Country bred band, Lucid. The host band will be taking the stage for two consecutive nights and they are the real deal. With that being said, boy do these guys bring in the talent! The bands on the roster of this festival are all very good. This is a truly great mix of local, regional, and national acts that is second to none.

Ivan Neville and Dumpstaphunk are quite busy this weekend. This is one of two festival performances they will be hitting up in Upstate New York. Once again, expect the New Orleans powerhouse party to take place. Chali 2na of Jurassic 5 fame will be hitting the stage with Break Science. This is another act who is making the rounds at these end of summer shindigs. They are a great act to catch for the listener that is looking for diversity. My favorite act on this bill would be Ulu. The five original members have recently reunited for a small host of shows that will be taking place throughout September. Think back to the late 90's and the jam band scene of old. Think.... The Wetlands...and the sweaty jazzy dance grooves that you loved from that time. That is Ulu. Hopefully they will break out The Grape and a Super Mario Brothers theme song for good measure. Burlington is well represented here as Rubblebucket and the Gordon Stone Trio will be bringing the joy as well. It would not be a North Country Festival without these Burlington standouts on deck. Rochester favorites, Thunder Body will be bringing their tripped out dub experience to Peru as well. For those of you that have no clue, this band is the new effort from former Giant Panda members, Rachel Orke



Dumpstaphunk - Photo from website

and Matt O'Brien. They will rage this place. Other acts on the bill include Hot Day At The Zoo, Spiritual Rez, Kung Fu, Twiddle, Bearquarium, Capital Zen, Ikebe Shakedown, and the Tim Herron Corporation.

More bands may be announced in the future, so stay tuned to the website. Check out www.backwoodspondfest.com for more info about the event. It will be a tough decision for many to make when deciding between Catskill Chill and this event. This event is just as good if not equal in every possible way! In either case, you can not go wrong!

CATSKILL CHILL MUSIC FESTIVAL

9/9-11/2011 - CAMP MINGLEWOOD - HANCOCK, NY

The Catskill Chill has announced their line-up for this year's edition. In its second year as an event, it is safe to say that this is easily one of the best festivals of the summer in Upstate New York. With it being at the end of the festy season, I am not sure if there will be a better way to end your summer than with this mammoth group of artists.

The headliners of this event are unbelievable! Umphrey's McGee is the leader of the pack here. What can be said about Umphrey's that has not been said before. They are arguably the best jamband on the face of the planet right now. Jake and the boys will be firing on all cylinders as always. Headlining the other nights are Conspirator, who feature Marc Brownstein and Aron Wagner from The Disco Biscuits. They are an electronic fireball of mayhem, and will give you much party pleasure. 7 Walkers who feature Bill Kreutzmann of The Dead, and Papa Mali, will be a nice treat for all of you of old schoolers. I am sure they will be bringing a night of Dead music and some originals to the table. These are the three can't miss shows of the festival. The event will also include Dumpstaphunk, an outfit featuring Mr. Ivan Neville. These guys are the bomb. New Orleans will certainly be in the house that night! Marvin Seals and JGB will also be taking the stage to the delight of all the Deadheads in Upstate New York. This is the summer that we are being blessed with



Umphrey's McGee - Photo by Mark Balchette

a whole lot of Dead affiliation. This festival definitely brings that to the forefront like our friends at Bella Terra. Other acts on the bill include Particle, Perpetual Groove, John Brown's Body, Zach Deputy, Giant Panda Guerrilla Dub Squad, Big Sam's Funky Nation, and the Pimps of Joytime, among a slew of others. I am highly interested in some of the DJ sets that will be taking place there as well. Most notably, DJ Logic, but also Kraz (Eric Krasno from Soulive). I am curious what he is going to bring to the table that night. It will be interesting for sure! For more info on bands and everything Catskill Chill, check out www.catskillchill.com

Come enjoy the Southern Tier, and this event which is shaping up to be one of the best of the summer. I know this, I will not miss this one. This, I can guarantee.

NORTH COUNTRY SWAMP JAM MUSIC, ARTS AND HARVEST FESTIVAL

9/30-10/2/2011 -

THE SHINING SUN ORGANIC GARDENS - LISBON, NY

The North Country Swamp Jam returns for it's second year of music, arts and fun. The event will take place at The Shining Sun Organic Gardens in tiny Lisbon. Once again, this is a festival loaded with great bands from Upstate New York, and some nationals that are truly in peak form.

On their webpage, the organizers elaborate on the festivities of the weekend. "The NCSJ provides two stages with no overlapping sets. There will also be fire dancers, visual artists, roaming artists, glass blowing demonstrations, and workshops," They add, "It will also have camping and hiking available. On the grounds there will be merchandise and food vendors, drum circles, a community graffiti wall and more." This year, the festival will hold raffles to benefit GardenShare, a local non-profit organization that helps in the fight against hunger in the St. Lawrence community. Additional proceeds will be donated to the St. Lawrence Arts Council to help with Music and Arts Programs in local schools. Donating will certainly help with those programs as schools have been hit hard with budget cuts in these departments.

Of course, the music is the bond that brings us to this event. In my opinion, the best band on this bill very well could be The MacPodz. They are one of my favorite bands in the funk and soul movement going on within the jam scene today. Roots of Creation is another great touring reggae act that will be bringing it's great vibes to the festival. The rest of the line-up contains what I would call a "who's who," of Upstate New York acts. Sophistafunk, Thunder Body, Manhattan Project, Subsoil, House On A Spring, Pia Mater, Roots Collider, AudioInflux, Aqueous, On The Sly, and Lucid highlight some of the finest that our state has to offer. Of course, there are many more. For more info on this event, please check out www.northcountryswampjam.org. It should be another great party up north.

[Words by Erik Jensen]

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+ PROFILES + THE ASTORIA PROJECT



*The Astoria Project -
Photo by Amanda Ashley*

Brandon Denton and Melissa Walker have been involved together in musical projects of one sort or another since junior high school. This duo's cohesiveness continued to gel in the four projects they were both apart of: Nemesis, First Ear's Glance, Socially Jaded and Like Fire. "Something about learning to write music at a young age with Brandon and our guitarist at the time, Andy Brown, really opened me up to the experience of listening to the collective conscious," Melissa says.

She adds, "It doesn't happen as easily for me with other people. Maybe it is as simple as our knowing how each other's minds work, being able to anticipate. But I also think it's an energy thing. We're bonded and things just flow easily." With the musical bond strengthened to perfection, this wonderful duo has truly solidified with their current endeavor, The Astoria Project.

Both being natives of Central New York, Melissa and Brandon reunited after a long hiatus which included a move west for both of them to the Rochester area. Brandon is now located in Buffalo, NY, but the music has continued to evolve. Usually this kind of distance can put a damper on the creative process, but not in this case. "Brandon being in Buffalo doesn't really impact our writing very much," says Melissa. "He'll show up with a chord progression or the beginning of one and we work with it a little, I take a listen and let it sink in. I usually like him to record it for me anyway as a scratch track and would even if he were down the street. But the truth is we write most of our stuff in one or two sittings. I'm just starting to bring some of my ideas from a guitar playing standpoint into the mix and digital recording really helps us share things like that and do homework before we get together."

After several prematurely aborted attempts at a full band, Brandon and Melissa have chosen to forge ahead with the music that matters so deeply to the both of them and let the listeners judge for themselves. It is a blues rock sound heavily influenced by grunge and features both acoustic and electric selections. These musicians are driven by their fascination with the crafting of quality songs and lyrics. "Most of my songs are really about personal experience, a direct one, kind of tossed against the background of some larger issue. I try not to make all of the songs about some bad relationship on its own, but about the reason things went wrong— social themes about love and respect and unity. I also do a lot of writing about things I'd like to see change," Melissa adds; "Things like mindsets, paradigms, love and openness, and the journey to

find and know one's self, factor in pretty regularly. As well as a little dash of anarchy for good measure."

The Astoria Project hopes to continue to raise their own bar and work across genres. Although, they occasionally dabble in a cover song or two, this band is all about delivering original music of the utmost authenticity. This is something that the band will seek to capture quite soon. The prospect of getting down to business is something that Melissa is very excited about. "I really do want to get into a studio again and let someone bring out the color I think we each bring to our music. I'd like for someone else to be responsible for the technical side so we could just create. I think things are just starting to gel enough that I'd feel comfortable having a good version of the songs down for posterity."

I highly recommend that you check them out on Facebook or ReverbNation. My first impression of the band was a great one. On ReverbNation, I listened to their great track "Face" and was overwhelmed by the possibilities that lie within their writing. You will be hearing and seeing a heck of a lot more of these guys in the near future. Check them out on August 27th at the Spokes and Ink Party In Rochester, NY.

DARWIN

Darwin is the creative outlet for Laura Black, Zach Schoonover and Adam Fryer. However, its beginnings were complicated to say the least. Laura and Zach (who have been dating for 4 years) were two of the original members of Reggae/Dance band El Ka Bong and enjoyed several years of nonstop shows, parties, and festivals. After a while, the band began to show signs of moving in separate directions and eventually split in the Spring of 2011.

Without missing a beat, Z & L began composing their own material. With no real equipment to work with, they utilized the surprisingly effective Garageband program on their laptop and set out to create a project that would redefine music in Upstate New York. Their first songs were created using a



Darwin - Photo by Hannah Schoonover

balance of organic sounds and digital counterparts, and the result was an infectious style of music the group likes to refer to as Experimental Alternative with a splash of Hip Hop. And thus, Darwin was born.

"I think the first tune we made, Orzo, was an excellent example of how really cool music could be made without a lot of production. It almost sounds like an old 60's recording," remarked Zach.

With only two members at the time, the pair's ideas were given room to breathe and flourish. Laura stated, "El Ka Bong was a great experience for me to grow, but with so many great musicians throwing ideas around, it was easy to get lost in the crowd. I feel like my ideas are considered more thoroughly now and I have a lot more creative control."

As their repertoire steadily grew and pressure to start playing live began weighing on their shoulders, it became obvious that a drummer was badly needed. As luck would have it, longtime friend and musical collaborator Adam Fryer was returning home from college.

"We didn't even have to ask him," Zach said, "he approached both of us at work and told us he'd already begun learning the songs we had posted online. If that's not commitment, I don't know what is!"

After one rehearsal, Adam was officially inducted into the Darwin family. His talents as a drummer and guitarist generated instant energy and momentum, and the new Trio began working daily to prepare a solid set list.

"Our roots are in the jam," said Adam, "We grew up in drum circles and nursed our musical thirst at festivals across NY. My first impression of this new project was fresh but oddly familiar, something only we could recognize. If I had to name it I'd call it Orgatronic: Phat, free organic jams bubbling with thunderous electric rhythms." To his dismay, the name 'Orgatronic' was already taken by a UK Latin Band.

The future of Darwin is truly encouraging. All of the members have years of experience onstage and crave the opportunity to entertain audiences once more. The styles of music they enjoy range across the entire spectrum, and will shine through the live show. Darwin's first performance will take place in the Fall of 2011, but new songs will be posted consistently on their website.

Check them out at Old City Hall in Oswego on Sept. 23rd and stay tuned for more dates.

[Words by Erik Jensen]

+ CONCERT REVIEW +

GRACE POTTER AND THE NOCTURNALS W/ CHAMBERLIN

6/24/2011 - WATER ST. MUSIC HALL - ROCHESTER, NY

I have had this date circled on my calendar since the day it was announced. Sure, I could have gone and seen Grace for free in Buffalo, or out to Utica at the Saranac Brewery. I chose my home turf, good old Rochester! It was a great choice indeed! The indoor venue which was jammed to the gills for this event, was the perfect environment to see this band in. I have seen some pretty good shows this year. So far, this one has been the best by a mile.

I had never heard Chamberlin before, but I had heard a lot of great things about them. This great roots rock oriented band from Vermont, turned many heads in the audience that night. It is no wonder that the Nocturnals have had them opening shows for them quite often in the last year. It was also a great introduction to a band that will be returning to Water St. in September with Carbon Leaf. Make sure to check them out next time. Although I was impressed thoroughly with this act, they could not prepare any of us for what was coming next.

When Grace and the band hit the stage, I thought the roof was going to fly off the top of the building. The band opened the show with a sweaty rendition of "Medicine," from their most recent album. In a live setting these numbers rock out even harder. I would have to say that 75% of this show was culled from their latest self-titled album, and all of them had an energy that was other-worldly. These guys raged when ripping through songs like, "Tiny Light," "Hot Summer Night," "Only Love," and "Oasis." The band closed the set with "Sugar," which lead into a vibrant "Paris," that came complete with a crowd induced sing along. We knew they would encore with something great, but I felt we had not had enough of the band. I mean, truly, they only played for about an hour and 15 minutes. That was my only gripe up to that point. They just leave you wanting more. The band came out and they slammed through a fan favorite, the sprawling "Nothing But The Water," that jammed out for close to 15 minutes. Now that is what I am talking about! Even though this show clocked in at about 90 minutes, it was intensely great for every second this band performed. I am never going to miss Ms. Potter and the crew at any point when they are in Upstate ever again. That is for sure. Even though I complain about the length of the set, it is because I have become spoiled by the 3 and a half hour marathons that I have witnessed by Phish, My Morning Jacket and countless others as of late. In any case, I will be trying to chase a show for the rest of the year, that will out do this one in quality!

[Words by Erik Jensen]

