

Blues in the park celebrates American music

by Roy Theiss

A celebration of music filled the air at Sunset Park April 14 during the Las Vegas Blues Society Fourth Annual Spring Picnic. Several thousand people were on hand to enjoy seven local blues bands and one from Austin, Tex.—The Scott Rhiner Band (formerly of Blues King fame).

The festival started around noon and lasted for six hours. Having its roots so entrenched in the American fabric, blues fans come from virtually every corner of society. Hippies from the '60s wearing their tie-dyed shirts blended in with a younger crowd of fashion emulators. Freaks came out in strong numbers, as did bikers. Both can relate to one of the blues' motifs of being ostracized.

Lions Share kicked things off with a couple of rhythm and blues tunes.

Then they showed everyone how extensive the blues influence is by doing a couple of tunes by Carlos Santana. Tom Sherman, lead guitarist, did a tasty cover of "Earth's Cry, Heavens Smile" and a soulful rendition of "Black Magic Woman" on his Gibson SG.

Most of the other bands stuck to their guns and played some kickin' blues. The Rough Necks were the only other band that deviated from the traditional blues sound. Their rousing '50s style of music was a reminder that without blues, there would be no rock 'n' roll.

As pervasive as blues is, it is surpassed only by its commitment and dedication by its musicians and listeners. For many, blues is a way of life. Las Vegas Blues Society members who have since moved away still come back for the jam festival. Blues fans from as far away as Phoenix and San Diego were in the audience.

Their loyalty was reciprocated by founding member of the Blues Kings, Rhiner. He flew his band in from Austin just for the occasion. At 3 p.m. Rhiner said "I'm really starting to get excited about being here. My hangover is starting to leave." (Rhiner played to a packed house of loyal blues fans at the Saddle & Spurs until 4 a.m. the night before.)

"This crowd is unbelievable," Rhiner said. "I've been away for two years (working in Austin) and I heard how great these picnics have been in the past. Now I'm actually seeing it. It's incredible."

Rhiner, the expert bottleneck guitar player, showed his appreciation with his lightning-quick guitar playing. During the last song before the two encores, Rhiner picked up a few style points with fans by flipping

his Fender Stratocaster behind his head for some guitar licks.

Bill Cherry, president of the Las Vegas Blues Society, said the first picnic in the fall of 1987 was held to form the Blues Society. At that picnic, approximately 200 people attended. The semi-annual tradition has been growing ever since and this picnic was bigger than anyone ever anticipated, Cherry said.

The size of the crowd caught everyone off guard, including the sound people. The sound was faint at the edges of the expansive crowd.

One good thing about Las Vegas' recent improved appreciation of blues is that more groups have been formed, which will be featured in upcoming issues.

Unity in diversity

Top names in the entertainment and political scenes for gay men and lesbians will be appearing at the Palace Station Hotel and Casino from June 6 through 9. The conference theme will be Unity in Diversity—the Color of Change.

The theme will reflect members' lives from the six-state region which makes up the Desert and Mountain States—Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

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CORRECTION:

The article appearing in the April 16, 1991 issue of *The Yellin' Rebel* entitled "Mary Wilson is standing on her own" should have been credited to Terry Stolz. We apologize for any inconvenience to the author and our readers.

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