

The Blues Swing Into Sunset Park

BY DANNY KIM
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The weather was beautiful, bright and sunny, and the air was filled with the sweet sounds of the blues.

Last Saturday, five talented blues groups, headlined by Grammy nominee, John Mayall and the Blues Breakers, strutted and hummed their stuff for over a thousand people in Sunset Park. On an excellent speaker arrangement, with just the perfect amount of punch in the bass, local blues favorite, the Vegas Kings with Scott Rhiner, kicked off the 3rd Annual Blues & Heritage Festival.

The vocalist, Carlos Thompson, ran up on stage after the first number, and together with the Vegas Kings, provided a decent rendition of the classic, "Mustang Sally." Their saxophonist, who looked like a cross between ZZ Top and Santa Claus, played with an abundance of spirit. For the rest of their show, they mixed up their rhythms, and warmed up the stage for the Chicago blues group, Jimmy Johnson.

With a tinge of urban street jazz, a whole lot of synthesized keyboard, and the big voice of their lead singer, Jimmy Johnson put on quite a show. W.C. Handy award-winner and Polygram recording artist Johnson has been called "one of the best performers on the blues circuit" by *The New York Times*. Their styles ranged from cool, jazzy blues, to some kind of reggae style, minus the Jamaican accent.

Next came Saffire, the "up-pity blueswomen", who hit the stage with a feminine effervescence, a steamy set of lyrics, and a touch of country. Saffire won the 1990 Handy Song of the Year Award for their song "Middle-Aged Blues Boogie." The trio's provocative songs peaked the hot crowd, and brought a few audience members to their feet. They even got called back from the side of the stage for a curtain call.

After the radio announcer rambled on for about ten minutes, everyone began to settle down for the next act. During the short break, a group of people were asked to leave by guards because of a no-alcohol policy which they had violated. This policy was most notably enforced at Woodstock '94, and is a result of the widespread effort to make events more family-oriented.

After this brief intermission, music resumed. Although they weren't necessarily playing the blues, the Crawford and McGriff Quartet certainly didn't disappoint with their old-style jazz organ and saxophone solo numbers. Hank Crawford started out by playing the saxophone for Ray Charles. Jimmy McGriff is considered one of the best blues organists today. They played a more jazz-like set of songs making a transition to contemporary blues.

As the Crawford/McGriff

Quartet closed out, the audience started to clamor for John Mayall. They would clamor much longer, as the Mayall act was delayed by technical problems. During the delay, radio announcers attempted to keep people occupied, while the Blues Breakers scurried across the stage repairing things. When the Blues Breakers finally began, everyone rose from the grass and onto their feet. Like Carlos Thompson, John Mayall made his way on stage after the first instrumental, with a harmonica buzzing in his mouth. Last year's Grammy nominee for the album "Wake Up Call" was a reflection of the critical acclaim Mayall and the new band members are receiving. The Blues Breakers have been a spawning ground for blues greats, most noticeably Eric Clapton. Mayall and the Blues Breakers lived up to their billing without question.

Overall, the Blues Festival was a triumph for the Clark County Parks & Recreation administration. There's always next year for those of you who missed it.



Sisters Kayla (Ginnie Barnson, l. to r.), Simone (Wendy Bagger) and Jodi (Shannon Hammermeister) argue over selling the family farm in *The Color of Bruise*. The play will be presented at 8 p.m. Oct. 13-15 and Oct. 19-22, and 2 p.m. matinee on Oct. 16 and 23, in the Black Box Theater in the Alta Ham Fine Arts Hall. *The Color of Bruise* is a bittersweet play about how women, even with the best intentions, can set traps for themselves and others. For more information contact the Performing Arts Center at 895-3801.

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