

Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

Welcome to what I'll refer to as the sweltering issue of Cuz's Corner. This kind of weather isn't exactly motivating in terms of getting out and doing much of anything, is it? Usually every year in late July one can expect to find at least some reprieve from the heat up at **Floyd-Fest**, but there was no such luck this year. I guess lower 90s is still better than the low 100s in Charlotte that weekend and it was at least tolerable in the shade and at night, so since the experience was a very positive one - I guess I have no complaints. I've written a lot about this festival through the last couple of years, so the emphasis here will be to turn you on to some new performers that caught my ear this year. I'll refrain from mentioning the fact that even more gardens, ponds, and fountains have been added since last year. I guess I shouldn't mention the fact that "Bob the Builder" and his volunteers have hand built another timber construction stage in the wine garden and two main stage speaker towers. I won't even mention the scantily clad trapeze artist dangling from helium balloons over the crowd on Saturday night nor all the great sets on the main stage, including two amazing back-to-back sets by **Old Crow Medicine Show** and the legendary **Levon Helm** and the amazing Celtic set on Sunday morning by **Solas**. As much as I want to, I suppose I shouldn't mention the four days of old country, old-time, and early bluegrass that Virginia State folklorist, John Lohman, brought to the "Porch" and the fact that it is true believers like John that keep these traditions alive. If I were specifically writing about the festival, I would definitely relay the fact that I always enjoy the eclectic variety of folks

this festival draws every year and how this mountain-top site has the feel of some sort of energy vortex. As much as I would like, I will refrain from mentioning the Backyard Revolution Workshops of **Adrienne Young** and her husband, **Luke Ramsey**, where one can learn about sustainable agriculture, composting, raising sheep and wool spinning, tanning hides, hearth cooking, blacksmithing, food preservation, and many more skills that have been lost through the years. No, friends, I just want to focus on the amazing array of artists I was introduced to at this year's festivities so you can perhaps look out for them at a nearby venue.

The artists I heard for the first time who blew me away this year included Swedish bluegrass group, the **Rockbridge Brothers**. Believe me, these guys sounded more like they came from across the mountain than from across the big pond. In terms of great old-time music, I just don't think that Galax-based **New Ballard Branch Bog-trotters** can be beat! Having won the best band category six times at Galax, the **Bogtrotters** not only have the instrumental tightness indicative of the best old-time bands, but fine vocals to boot. While walking by the dance tent I happened on the eclectic sounds of **Miss Tess & the Bon Ton Parade**. The original tunes played by this band more than did justice to those musical styles of the South that stem from the jazz, blues, swing, and folk traditions. Having grown up in the Virginia coal camps in the 20's and 30's, "Nat" Reese laid down a set of traditional blues as good as any I've ever heard. Evi-

dently for those in the know, "Nat" is a living legend. If you are not familiar with him, perhaps you should be if you really are into acoustic blues. One of the coolest sets I caught at the Folklife stage was rendered by blues soul singer **Alexis P. Suter** and West African ngoni master **Bassekou Kouyate**. This one-hour jam took us on a journey from Africa to America and back again. Both of these artists are more than worth a listen, but you should do yourselves a favor and check out the intoxicating rhythms of Bassekou's band, **Ngoni ba**. If there is a better traditional African band on the

planet, I'd sure like to hear them! Finally, **Galactic** featuring **Corey Henry** of the **Re-birth Brass Band**, laid down some of the most serious jazz and New Orleans funk I've recently heard. Usually this genre isn't my cup of tea, but **Galactic** simply takes it to



"Cuz" and Little Bit

another level. They come through Charlotte about once a year, so if you are in the mood to dust off your dancing shoes, this might be the band! There were several more artists I would love to tell you about, but it's getting about time to tell you about some great recorded music I've discovered in the last month.

As you recall, last month I reviewed **Tim O'Brien's Two Oceans Trio** disc and promised to fill you in on his other new project, **Chicken and Egg**, as soon as I could hear it. As I like to keep promises, I am tickled to report that Tim's latest work is as compelling as anything he has recorded since **Hot Rise**. This is a full band project that deftly bounces back and forth between traditionals and Tim O'Brien originals. I feel Tim O'Brien's work has been as con-

sistent as any folk musician alive over the last decades and **Chicken and Egg** does nothing to change my mind – a keeper, as are all the CDs he’s ever recorded. My very favorite of his CDs, if you should ask, is **The Crossing**. (www.timobrien.net)

When asked which rock band is my favorite these days, I think a short moment and say it’s probably L.A. based **Los Lobos**. Of course, as many of you know, **Los Lobos** is much, much more than just a rock band as they deftly fuse many genres of American roots music with their native Hispanic music to form a sound that is all their own. For years David Hidalgo and Louie Perez have been writing intelligent lyrics about real people and urban life and every once in a while the band whips out traditional instruments and takes the listener on a journey into Mexico. Well, their new one, **Tin Can Trust**, is as good as I have heard from the band since **Kiko and the Lavender Moon**. In fact, this disc is very difficult to eject from my CD player unless my wife, Carolyn, is ejecting it to put in her car for the day! There is much wrong, in my opinion, with modern day rock as it seems to lose connection with its roots at times. Not so with **Los Lobos**. This disc has groove, intelligent lyrics, great vocals and instrumentals, along with a couple of traditionals thrown in for good measure. The listener hears soul, jazz, blues, folk, and gospel in every track – this is my favorite CD of the month! (www.loslobos.org). Also, note that the band will be playing on Saturday, August 7th, at the North Carolina Museum of Art Park in Raleigh – sounds like a road trip to me! (www.ncartmuseum.org)

T-Bone Burnett has been on a roll recently and this month two of his productions are on my list of recommendations. First, **Willie Nelson’s Country Music** is a flashback

to the classic songs and stylings of days gone by. Buddy Miller, Riley Baugus, Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan, and others give this one that classic country sound and Willie’s voice has never sounded better on tunes like **You Done Me Wrong, My Baby’s Gone, Satisfied Mind, Dark as a Dungeon** and many more. (www.willienelson.com) Another keeper is **John Mellencamp’s** up and coming **No Better than This** disc. Recorded on a single track, this one sounds much like those old work camp recordings of days gone by in tone, texture, and lyrical content. Forget about the pop/rock star of old – this is something totally different! (www.johnmellencamp.com) That’s it for this month’s visit. Please force yourselves out into the heat and into your local music venue for some live music. You’ll be better off for it! Until next month!

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