

Ground Coverage: Eagle Rock Music & Arts Festival

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Stumbling off the 81 bus, my friend and I danced past the always musically forward Rastafarian Ice Cream Truck and dashed on over to the best taco truck on the block. Tacos La Estrella: Tacos & Burritos gave me a free Coke with 3 of the best carnitas tacos I've eaten in awhile.

After getting started on a promising foot we began our trek along Colorado Boulevard and experienced the oddest look into the futures of our peers in the form of super-eclectic, hipster families. At about 5ish in the afternoon it seemed like there was no end in sight to all these stroller hipsters walking around with their 1.5 person families. How dare they, making me feel bad for being slightly intoxicated, yielding an American Spirit, trying to make my way down the street with a barely understandable map.

Five-ish came and went and there I stood, map in hand, feeling like Link from Zelda, trying to forge a way to see the bands we wanted to check out, and still had a map fail. The map, the one with pictures and set times on the back became pointless, but we still tried to figure out where and when some of the bands were playing.

It was basically useless because, one, some of the stages were basically on the same stage just called a different thing (Kingsize Soundlabs Stage/The Ship Stage). Two, they were hidden and not directly on Colorado Boulevard (American Legion Hall). Three, the set times of one DJ ran later than expected which should always be expected (Soul in the Park/Future Music Stage). There's only one thing to do when put in a confusing situation, try to make the best of it, adapt, move on.

We ended up finding the American Legion Hall tucked between Merton Avenue (Caspar = over-priced gourmet world food alleyway) and Colorado and ended up stumbling in on a Random Patterns set. The American Legion was what I imagined was used for old World War dances, except that Random Patterns set the mood for a very loud and distorted prom band. Not that they played prom songs, but their entire set was muffled by blaring speakers that bounced off the acoustics of the hall.

You could tell that beneath all the loudness that there was a promising band beneath, but not even the saxophonist and the amazingly intense drummer (props to the guy who helped him get part of his cymbal set back onstage after it fell off) could salvage the sound levels. Just a note: NO props to the lighting guy who kept shining bright production lights in the eyes of the band. Good job, guy.

Although the band started out rough and loud, I give them props for making the best out of the semi-discouraging things that were occurring around them. Way to keep playing! That doesn't mean I don't have a small complaint to the band – say the track title loud and clear for the people who are jotting down notes about you. It'll help come review time. Or turn down your

amps so we can make out the song title through the lyrics. Thanks. Much appreciated.

Next we headed into the Coffee Table Lounge, the only sports bar on Colorado and a great selection of \$5 beer, and decided to look at the map again to plot our course. After being pushed to the edge of confusion again we got up and decided to find the next stage – Soul in the Park/Future Music Stage. Basically, we went to go find the electronic and DJ stage. We got there and caught Computer Jay's set and a DJ by the name of Free the Robots.

Computer Jay began his set with what sounded like a thousand rabid pigeons cooing at the same time, except that they were digitalized. I think the guy said that he was using an Atari 600 to create whatever sounds he was making at the time, and that's alright with me. I didn't know that's what it took to create those kinds of sounds, but I now see why it sounded 8-bit. Most of Computer Jay's mixes were low key and appropriately chill for a Saturday afternoon.

Free the Robots took the stage and immediately had sound problems. He quickly overcame this and moved on to an intense mashup of edgier and sexier beats. At one point the guy used some sort of "Close Encounters" crazy aleatoric sound that inspired some wobbly toddlers start dancing. Hell, I even got down! At this point the sun was about three quarters down and the tall boy brown bags started coming out. People became braver and more nocturnal. The full moon helped, I'm sure. We didn't get to see DJ Nobody like we hoped because Free The Robots went over time, but that's okay because it pushed us to move on to The Ship Stage to see The French Semester.

On our way to the Ship Stage my friend and I noticed that there were lots of people wearing t-shirts that said "The Rock 90041" and "Mount Wash 90065". I don't know if it was self imposed jealousy that I didn't have on a 90501 zip code t-shirt, but I was not feeling it. But what I was feeling was the little wooden stage a group of about 8 or 10 performers set up curbside of the 7-11. That was the most unexpected awesomeness that came out of the night. They each had what looked to be ukuleles with 8 strings! The people playing the ukuleles stood around the wooden stage and two women began dancing and clicking their heels to the beat. I don't know what their name is, but if anyone knows, let me know! The Latin/Spanish/I don't know-inspired performance was mind blowing and inspirational, since they were not a featured band and just randomly appeared! They even accrued their own dancing crowd! And since the crowd kept growing and show time for The French Semester was near, we moved on.

One thing about the indie rogue band The French Semester is that they have a sound that directly nods appreciation to their influences -The Zombies, The Flaming Lips, and Neutral Milk Hotel. They embody an honest, simple-complicated, yet modern-classic acoustic rock sound that they own. To me, they sound similar to a band called The Anniversary and share a deep rooted psychedelic Velvet Underground sensibility that's set off by the tambourine and accompanying female vocals. Come performance, each band member approached their instruments, stage, and crowd with a sort of mature fearlessness (maybe this came from their recent spring '09 tour). They kicked off the set with a new song "A Shout Out to the Underside" (EP out in a few months!), jived into "Backwards Rolling" and "The East Man" (both from full length album Good Friends Only I Could See), and then gave the sea of concertgoers three

more new TFS tracks, “Deep Tissue on a Saturday Night”, “Lessons on the Autoway”, and ended their set with “The Large Bouquet”. They rocked it and the crowd thanked them with genuine hoots and claps for helping to create an easy transition from laid back summer into nostalgic and bittersweet fall.

Out of all of the performances I saw I think my favorite memory comes from the group of 8 or 10 musicians who managed to play their 8-string instruments in unison. Each strumming, plucking and singing while two dancers on a makeshift stage click their heels to the beat. They weren’t even on the bill and they had a stage and had a focused and intensely joyful audience to dance and keep beat with. That’s what I love about hometown music festivals – they’re smaller than mainstream Coachella and promote the growth of independent musical talent while celebrating the DIY, do it yourself innovation that only musicians and artists can provide.