

Faro festival a bastion for emerging talent

By **ANDREW HOSHKI**
The Whitehorse Star

FARO – This year's farrago music festival was an eclectic mix of local talent, artists from around the territory and headliners from afar.

In terms of genre, the festival, which took place over the long weekend, ran the gamut with jazz, blues, folk, country and rock.

REVIEW

Nick Gilder, the lead singer for Sweeney Todd, was very impressed with the event's location.

"Picturesque, scenic... there isn't really a word for it. It's something grandeur," said Gilder. "The people here are very warm and friendly."

"Faro is one of the few places left in North America where you can go to sleep at night and feel safe leaving your door unlocked."

This was the band's first appearance in the Yukon. Playing two performances during the festival, Sweeney Todd was for many people the most anticipated portion of the festival.

"Back in the day we did a lot of smaller tours," he said. "All these years later, we're making up for lost time."

Sweeney Todd formed in the mid-1970s, quickly rose to stardom and then suddenly broke up after three years.

"The split-up was the most bizarre thing in the world," said Gilder. "It was a difference of opinions, of ideas and direction. It's much harder to work things out when you're younger. I've tried to get the original band back together, but after all these years, some of them still have a problem with it."

"We've got a solid unit together here though that laughs a lot. It's kickin'. We're really enjoying ourselves. The sheer joy of performing has given me a renewed appreciation for the gift of it. It's made me realize how much it meant to me. It's like we're living out a vision we had so many years ago and seeing it come to fruition. It's a unique experience."

Everyone, said Gilder, "should come up and see what the world once was. The peace and solitude captures the majesty of the wide open spaces."

Mark Kenny, the bass player for Sweeney Todd, thought the festival was excellent and found the people to be very friendly.

"The people were real hospitable," he said. "I played in Dawson years ago, and the Yukon is exactly as I remember it."

Kim Burly of The Stampeders was awestruck by the territory's beauty.

"It's a fabulous place, full of endless space. The territories are the only part of Canada we haven't been to."

The Stampeders played the final performance on Friday night, completing the evening with a lively set that packed the main tent.

Though the band broke up in 1980 after nine years, they have now been back together for 12 years. Currently, they play about 40 dates a year and are well received everywhere they go.

"We're all over the map, going back and forth across the country," said Burly.

"We threaten to go back into the studio," he said, when asked if a new Stampeders album would be forthcoming. "It's awkward business for guys our age, but we hope to have a new release by next year."

The real highlights of the festival though were not the big-name headliners, who simply replayed old songs from

yesterday, but rather the young, emerging artists who passionately performed new music.

Take Scott Macleod, for instance. He grew up in P.E.I. and moved to Calgary three years ago to experience a new part of the country and try out different things. Since moving, he has gotten into music, has made a three-song demo and is now working on an album.

"I've been writing music most of my life, but really got into it in Calgary," said Macleod. "I play roots rock. There are so many names or terms for it. It's sort of a country, rock, folk combination. I write songs about everyday people, places, situations... What you and me and everybody else goes through."

Macleod has his next performance at the Calgary Stampede.

From Whitehorse was the young rock band Dec and the As, formerly known as Knob. Formed recently, the band is composed of two sets of brothers, Joel and Adrian Bergman and Ryan and Declan O'Donovan.

Ringleader and lead singer Declan described their sound as "Get 'er done music."

"We dabble between rock, jazz and comedy. We draw from lots of different styles," he said.

"It's music to make love to," added Adrian.

"We really just fake it," said Ryan.

"We've all played so many different styles in other bands," said Joel.

"Actually, we're working on being rock stars," said Declan.

Dec and the As will make their next appearance on Main Street as part of the Longest Days festival on July 26 and then at The Boiler Room on July 30. They are currently working on a CD.

Also from Whitehorse was the heavy metal band Say No More.

"We're just a bunch of guys getting together to play music," said Travis Pryor, the band's frontman. "It all starts with one little note, and a month later it's turned into a song. We play whatever we can play."

"There's infinite meanings behind every song," he said. "We leave it open so people can decide what it's about."

Roxx Hunter, the Say No More bassist, said the focus of the band was on jamming and experimenting with music.

"There aren't a lot of original bands around. We don't like to play covers," he said. "We wanted to come here and rock out to our tunes."

"I play to prove to myself that I can do it, and to make everybody else smile, if only for five minutes," said Pryor. "So in that regard it's just like sex!"

"When I'm playing is the only time I feel comfortable in the world," said Hunter. "I can connect. When I'm off stage, I'm like everybody else, but on stage, I'm the king of the world."

Say No More will be playing the Kopper King and the Capital Hotel in August and is hoping to make a CD in the near future.

Derek Holmes, from Whitehorse, played folk music on Friday afternoon. Holmes has just recently gotten back into music following a long hiatus.

"I used to play in college, but then stopped," he said. "My daughter encouraged me to do a demo, and I ended up recording a record. Now I have to figure out how to promote and distribute it. We're doing it all independently."

Holmes hopes to have his CD released by Christmas, but is taking his time with it to focus on making it sound nice.

"The songs are really stories," he said. "If there are musical parts which take away from the stories, then we take



Photo by ANDREW HOSHKI

HARDCORE – Joey Wowk, the lead guitarist in Sweeney Todd, had a very lively and theatrical way of performing.



Photo by ANDREW HOSHKI

HELPING HANDS – Michael Brooks (centre) enlisted some kids for the Bingo Bongo Boogie Band performance.

them out. It's been a lot of fun to do."

Stormin' Norman Jack, from Watson Lake, played light country rock on Saturday afternoon.

"Music is a gift and should be shared," he said. "Music is a healer – it's a strong tradition. My goal is to influence one young person to play guitar."

Jeanne "Genie" Clarke of Mamma G's, a Faro artist, was delighted with the festival.

"I never thought I'd like performing outdoors, but I do. There's not too

many mosquitos," she said.

Jeanne has been performing her style of rock and jazz for about 10 years.

Michael Brooks, of the Bingo Bongo Boogie Band, entertained children on Saturday afternoon.

"This is my third Faro and I really enjoy the intimacy this festival has by being a little bit smaller than the rest – by the end, you've met everyone," said Brooks.

"This is the most rewarding kind of music," he said. "Kids are totally honest. If they like you, you know it right

away."

The performance by the Boogie Band was a mix of styles, ranging from jazz to rock to country.

"The wonderful thing about it is that you can borrow from any genre," he said. "The only criteria is whether it makes kids laugh, smile and dance. At that age, you don't have to lock yourself into any one genre or style."

"In the words of the great philosopher Wayne from Scarborough, of Wayne's World 'Party on.'"

Of the festival's non-Yukon talent, first nations artist Wayne Lavallee was a shining star. Lavallee has made several appearances in the territory this year, including Watson Lake, Dawson City and Whitehorse. Faro, though, was a special experience for him.

"Faro has a really great energy," he said. "When I first rolled into town and saw the festival grounds, I knew it was a real great community here."

"The first nations community was very receptive. I do this to connect with first nations audiences. It's about being a role model, to show that we are active in the recording industry."

"It's taken me a long time to get to where I am in my career. It's great being able to make a living this way."

Shakti Hayes, from Bellingham, WA, played bass for Lavallee.

"Wayne's amazing," she said. "He brings me along to his shows, and I love to go."

Lavallee met Hayes at a festival a few years ago and asked her to play with him.

"Oddly enough, we ended up being roommates and good friends," said Hayes.

Ideally, Hayes would like to play music full-time and aspires to someday reach that goal.

Lavallee and Hayes make one more Yukon appearance this summer, at the Indian Days in Champagne on July 30.

As the final act, Yukon Jack, took the stage on Saturday night, festival organizer Donna Smith commented that the weekend had been a great success.

"There were no problems at all, no fights, everyone was great," she said. Not wanting to reveal her favourites, Smith said that there had been a lot of great music over the weekend.

She roughly estimated that about 650 people had attended the festival.

On the whole, it was a good festival, though it could have been better. As one sound technician put it, "Great music, poor attendance."

The seemingly low number of people overshadowed the event. Though there was the threat of rain throughout the weekend, Canada Day activities in Whitehorse probably kept many people away.

If the Faro festival organizers want to attract more people, perhaps they should consider holding the festival on a non-holiday weekend. That way, people would be more tempted to attend, with there being fewer things to do to choose from.

The Saturday evening performance was anti-climatic, another drawback. The headliner, Sweeney Todd, performed early on, at 7 p.m., followed by Lavallee and several Yukon bands. After Sweeney Todd played, most of the crowd seemed to disappear.

Which is a shame, as there were five great bands still to be heard. They included long-time favourites like Barb Chamberlin and newcomers Say No More.

For those who did stay, though, the festival proved to be a great experience and hopefully will continue to be a Yukon tradition for many years to come.