

2011 Bluesfest Reaches New Heights

Age has not wearied the headliners of the 22nd Byron Bay Bluesfest

EXPECTATION CAN BE A cruel mistress, as Bluesfest director Peter Noble will find when it comes to programming next year's festival. Such was the calibre of the line-up at this year's gathering that, short of raising the dead, it will be near-impossible to top.

Bob Dylan, B.B. King, Elvis Costello and Grace Jones led the six-day event, along with the likes of Robert Randolph, Trombone Shorty, the Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi Band, Mavis Staples, Irma Thomas and Gurrumul. Add in the dozens of other acts that made the pilgrimage to the Tyagarah Tea Tree Farm in Byron Bay for this year's concert, and the result was what some in the press have been calling the "best festival line-up in Australia, ever".

"I know we do everything we can each year to better our festival, but let's just say, this year will be very hard to beat," Noble gushed at the time. "We've been blessed with good weather, we've had a very peaceful and happy event, and we've had the planet's finest artists delivering incredible music for six days and nights straight." Six days, indeed: plenty of time to find those periods of musical nirvana, that one moment that transcends all others.

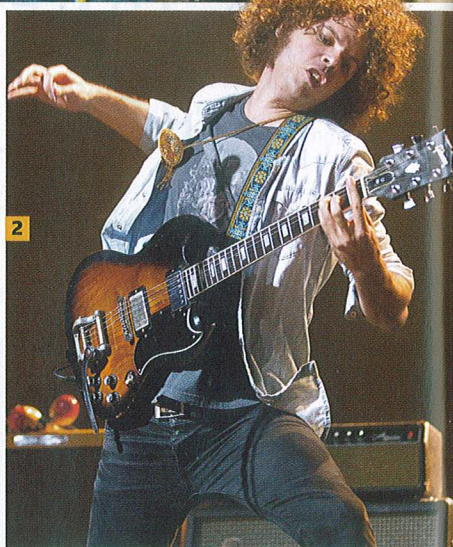
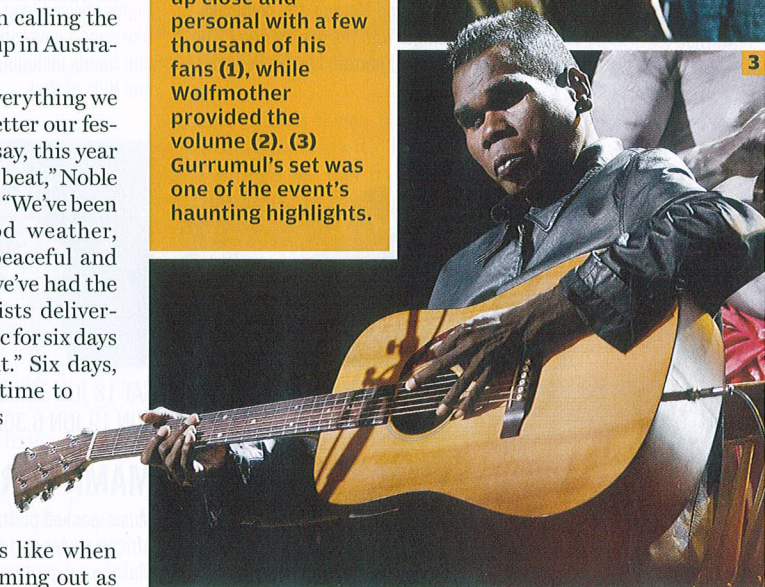
"Little moments like when the sun started coming out as we were finishing 'Persuasion,'" smiled Tim Finn, minutes after walking offstage on the Tuesday evening. "The piano was playing and you [felt] that big rush and the energy coming from the crowd." Finn's refined set was in direct contrast to that by George Clinton Parliament Funkadelic, whose funky pop groove later that night rode roughshod over grace and elegance. Which is, of course, part of their appeal.

"It gets to a point where I shout stuff out to the band that they don't even remember," Clinton rasped with a laugh,



Got the Blues

Michael Franti got up close and personal with a few thousand of his fans (1), while Wolfmother provided the volume (2). (3) Gurrumul's set was one of the event's haunting highlights.



"We've had the planet's finest artists delivering incredible music."

not long before their set. "Because we play for so long, we get near the end and it's like, 'Oh shit, what the fuck?' That's when we start making stuff up because they're like, 'What is he talking about? Am I in the right key?' And that's fun, that's why we still play."

Robert Randolph and the Family Band, back for the first

time since 2003, patched together wonderfully towering grooves which they rode into the dirt with aplomb; Mavis Staples, at 72 years of age, showed little sign of slowing down, a hearty version of "The Weight" bringing Elvis Costello up on stage; Ben Harper was in his element, combining members of the Innocent Criminals

with half of the Relentless 7 to delve deep into his catalogue.

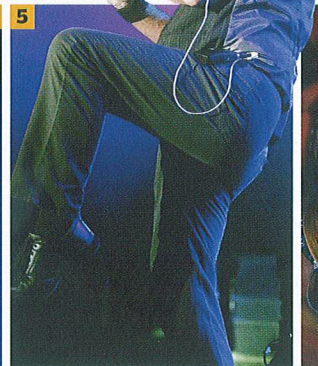
For Alex Lloyd, who was playing alongside Stephen and Alan Pigram in the Mad Bastards, the festival was a revelation. "I'm pretty blown away to be honest," he smiled, a glass of red wine in hand, not long after the Mad Bastards' second set. "The response to us has been really good... we weren't billed very high, but people know about it, it's really a good feeling." A good feeling indeed, one echoed by Gurrumul's accompanist and producer, Michael Hohnen.

ALL IMAGES PAUL SMITH, EXCEPT B.B. KING AND IAN ANDERSON GETTY IMAGES



Still Got the Blues

B.B. King soldiered on with his trusty Lucille (1), while Bob Dylan was in rare form (2). George Clinton got into the mood with a little assistance (3), as Rodrigo Y Gabriela dazzled (4). Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson (5), Elvis Costello (6) and Grace Jones (7).



day. "Sunday night was a bit of a warm-up for him... but he's concentrating more on tonight. I think that voice will open up a bit more on a few different things."

Blues legend B.B. King provided both the highlight and the lowlight of the festival. Once a towering inferno of a man, to see him this year was to witness an old man with a failing voice. And while his guitar was still sweet, and his band second to none (particularly drummer Tony Coleman), this is a man coming to the end of

"He has taken this whole festival seriously, partly based on tonight," said Hohnen, referring to Gurrumul's spot between two of the world's greatest songwriters, Paul Kelly and Bob Dylan, on the Tues-

his musical life. Standing side-stage just to be close, it was both heartrending and heartwarming to see him shuffle on stage, sit down and take Lucille on his lap - good and bad at the same time.

Bob Dylan, meanwhile, came as a surprise, breathing new life into "Like a Rolling Stone", "It Ain't Me Babe" and "Tangled Up In Blue". His headline set provided a fitting end to a festival that covered all the bases, but left one lingering question: how on earth will they top it next year? **SAMUEL J. FELL**

IN THE NEWS

Foos deliver for charity

Foo Fighters raised more than one million dollars for victims of the Christchurch earthquake and Queensland floods on their recent Antipodean visit. The revenue from their charity gigs in Brisbane and Auckland totalled AUD\$770,717 and NZ\$354,903 respectively, figures that were calculated and confirmed by an independent accounting firm. "This is an extremely generous donation from the Foo Fighters and I just want to say a big thank you," said QLD Premier Anna Bligh. The money was donated to the New Zealand Government Christchurch Earthquake Appeal and the Queensland Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal.



Groh

Kylie: Up in Lights

After first announcing the project in 2010, Kylie Minogue has said the musical based on her career should be finished next year. The project is a collaboration between Kylie and her stylist William Blake, and will use her own music as the score. A scriptwriter has been brought in, but so far no title has been released for the project. London has been chosen as the venue for the show's debut.



Minogue

T-shirts as Investments

If your cupboard is full of old gig T-shirts, think twice before throwing them away - a vintage Led Zeppelin T-shirt recently sold for \$10,000 on eBay. But before you go auctioning your shirts and buying a new house, know that this was a very special garment indeed. It was produced in super limited numbers as a wearable backstage pass for the band's concerts at Knebworth House in Knebworth, England, in 1979. The seller paid \$100 for it, buying it off the owners of the print shop that made them.

Mos Def for Dexter

Rapper Mos Def will further his acting career by starring in a multi-episode arc in the sixth season of *Dexter*. He will be playing a hardened ex-con who will no doubt fuel Dex's bloodlust.



Mos Def