

# Tompkins fest a success

Only one snag, not enough to hinder festival goers' spirit

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Excitement.  
Rock.  
Rock.  
More Rock.  
Unrest.  
Excitement.  
Rock.  
More Rock.  
The End.

That was the 1997 Tompkins Square Riot Gathering fairy tale, as told by the participants. The Riot took place March 28 and 29 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

The show was a complete success in my eyes, but it was not without its snags.

The unrest came at around 8:30 Saturday night. The members of Piebald, an excellent melodic rock band, were pleading their case to Nate, one of the fest's organizers.

They complained that they did not get their fair share of money, and that they did not have enough money to get back home. Nate calmly told them that he had run out of money, and that he could not help them out.

After about twenty minutes, the discussion dissipated, and the music began again.

That was the only snag in an otherwise brilliant music festival.

The fest started off with a blast. Behind Closed Doors was the first band on Friday at 5 PM. Their bassist was a southpaw, but he

played a right-handed bass. I'm not sure if that was their trick, but they rickety-rocked.

The next band was Junta. I really didn't pay any attention to them, as I was busy perusing the various music and fanzine stands. The band after Junta, Haberdasher, finished their set with a brutal chugga-chugga ending. The drummer pounded on garbage cans and the singer played the drums as they wrapped up.

Other bands of note were Pressgang (a Pittsburgh band that sounds similar to Unsane), Shale (another Steel City band that sounds like no other, a post-hardcore instrumental machine that brands cows everywhere with their mark of tight, bruising emo), The Great Unraveling (very similar to Unwound, this Kill Rock Stars band played with a constant drone in the background for 30 minutes), and Braid (a rocking melodic band that boasts two, count 'em, two good singers).

That Friday went smoothly. Bands played 30 minute sets, had their stuff down in 5 minutes, and the next band was ready to play in another 5. I have never seen a show in which bands were rotated

so fast. I immensely respected that.

Friday's festivities ended at 12:00 in the morning Saturday. My friends and I walked excitedly back to our shelter for the night, and we slept a mere 8 hours before it was time to rock out to more music.

At 11:30 on Saturday, Midcarsonjuly kicked things off with a wicked melodic raspberry blend of Lipton emo-tea. They sounded like Jawbox, a similarity I enjoyed thoroughly.

The drummer from Midcarsonjuly stuck around to play in The Jazz Man's Needle, an unscheduled band that equaled the intensity of Midcarsonjuly.

Up next was The Jazz June. Ooh baby, these guys were good. Three guitarists created a wall of melodic (notice a trend?) rock. A sort of Samiam meets The Promise Ring. The Jazz June were brilliant, combining two parts harmony and one part melody into an ear-pleasing mixture of rocking good music.

Following The Jazz June was Judas Iscariot. Featuring a drummer, a distorted fuzz bassist, and a singer/trumpeter/spoken word artist/bottom-tummy-screamer, Judas Iscariot played

short bursts of brutal energy. They played about 25 songs in their 30 minute slot, some songs lasting only 20 seconds.

And the music continued. The State Secedes was the next band to play. They boasted six members: two guitarists, two singers, a bassist, and a violinist (who could barely be heard above the noise). These guys played only two songs in their set, extending their songs and



JUMBO!



FRODUS!

Photos by Kenneth "Lopen" Hawk

As the crowd became silent, and the boy broke down into tears, Puritan funneled that emotion into the next song. Everyone was crying and screaming out their sympathies, and the energy was so thick you could cut it with a piece of cutlery.

That experience matched the best emotional level that I had ever reached at a show before, and my heart ached afterwards. I think a lot of kids left with something after that performance.

Rent America was the next band to perform. I was completely uninterested in their old-school punk style. The band following them, Agna Moraine's Autobiography, were even worse. The time it takes to say their name is longer than they actually played, as someone said something stupid and their was an argument for the rest of their set.

After they left, that was when the Piebald incident occurred. Seeing that that was slowly deteriorating the crowd's interest, the next band began to set up.

The Sleepy Time Trio was the name of that band, and they rocked. They struck me as the epitome of Shellac, a post-hardcore band boasting Steve Albini, a man who has worked with Nirvana and Bush (ugh, poo, gunky). The Trio was very tight, very poised, very intense, and I was very pleased.

After Sleepy Time came 400 Years, a band flaunting the only female musician playing the fest. She was the bassist, happy was the crowd, electric was the performance.

Finally, finally, finally, the Washington, D.C. fun-core band Frodus played. Somehow, the crowd still had energy at 12:00 Sunday morning, and they danced mercilessly. Ending the fest on a fun note was probably the toughest thing to do, but Frodus pulled it off without a hitch.

I really, really, really enjoyed myself. I expected 5 or 6 bands to be pretty good, but about 23 of them were amazing. Twenty full hours of music were more than my wimpy emo-frame could take, and I was exhausted, but I was the better for attending. If there is a 1998 Tompkins Square Riot Gathering, I will definitely be there.

NOTES: On January 13, 1874, the original Tompkins Square Riot took place. As unemployed workers demonstrated in New York's Tompkin's Square Park, a detachment of mounted police charged into the crowd, beating men, women and children indiscriminately with billy clubs and leaving hundreds of casualties in their wake. Commented Abram Duryee, the Commissioner of Police, "It was the most glorious sight I ever saw..."-from the Tompkins Square Riot program flier.

The fine boys that put this show together (Nate, Paul, and Elad, I don't really know their last names) did an excellent job. Without their efforts, I don't think I would have ever been exposed to so much fine music.

If you are reading this, you're either on the final leg of a long toilet trip or you're really into bands. Either way, I applaud you.

experimenting with various forms of coherence. Their sound and structure was similar to Six Finger Satellite (a band on the illustrious Sub Pop, I mean Pop, label).

Next up was Closure, a band I think I thought was very good. With 26 bands playing, it's very easy to forget those bands that don't make an indelible impact.

Following Closure was Ethel Meserve, a band from State College.

Wow. Ethel Meserve played flawless melodic pop emo rock. I couldn't help but groove to their tight blend of healthy hooks and fit guitar-picking. They completely schlonged me, and when they finished, I clapped longer than anyone else.

And then, without further ado, came Jumbo, the co-mutha of all Pittsburgh bands (Shale being the other co-mutha, I think they hand out that award at the annual Pittsburgh Music Mutha Awards).

Jumbo features the coolest of all Pittsburgh musicians, Jason Jouver. Jason has been in such prestigious Pittsburgh bands as Liquid Brick and Irwin. He helps define the band's sound, which embraces hardcore, emo, and old-fashioned crunch. Jumbo hook you with their intensity and focus, and reel you in with their precision and tact.

Moloch was up next. I cannot remember much about them, but they did do a cover of the Blues Brother's "Soul Man." Anybody that does the Blues Brothers is a friend of mine.

Then came Piebald. As I mentioned before, they are a melodic rock band, perhaps the best at the entire festival. Their finale was a rousing rendition of AC/DC's "Shook Me All Night Long." Everyone sang along, and everyone was truly happy.

The originally scheduled band, Franklin, did not show, so Puritan played ahead of schedule.

Whoa. Puritan put on a crushing show. They played out-and-out tuff hardcore, and they had everyone screaming along. Their singer was insane: he rolled around on the floor and spazzed so much that he cut his face.

A kid from the crowd interjected between songs, and he told everyone about his father, who had just passed away. He felt immense regret that he never really connected with his father before he died, and now he would never have the chance.

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