

Seat Sale

Sydney, Cape Breton: All That and a Bale of Hay

by Stephan MacLEOD

Once a haven for the steel industry, the economically deprived Sydney has little to offer its youth community. This is why much of the current generation has packed up and migrated to more prosperous places to live. Despite the instability of its scene, every Thanksgiving Weekend Sydney becomes a hub of activity for young artists and fans during Gobblefest, a celebration of independent music in Industrial Cape Breton.

This year was the eighth year of the festival and boasted over thirty bands for three full days of music. I arrived on Saturday with Summerside band Lending Jane. We pulled up to the venue for Saturday's all-ages show, the Christ Church Hall, but we could barely drive past as the road was packed with about a hundred teenagers gathered outside the venue smoking and skateboarding in between sets.

After unloading our luggage and gear at my friend's parents' place, and stopping by for a brief visit at the House of Rock, we returned to the Christ Church Hall to catch local band Tilted's set. Like many of the bands from Cape Breton, Tilted are extremely energetic performers and talented songwriters. When the band hit the

stage, everyone outside put out their smokes and filled the hall with their voices as they sang along to all of Tilted's songs.

We left the hall after Tilted's set and drove past the casino on George Street, took a left at Jasper's 24 Hour Family Restaurant and parked across from the Legion. We entered a bar called Chandler's (their logo was spelled in the same disgusting typography of Matthew Perry's hit television series) and caught up with Charlottetown's Eyes For Telescopes after their sound check. Chandler's was going to be the only licenced venue at this year's Gobblefest, and the turnout was expected to be high. The bar was not packed yet, but there was still an impressive amount of people there for so early in the evening. Eyes For Telescopes did not start playing until around midnight, followed by Rock Ranger.

Jay Smith looked pretty wasted before he even took the stage with Rock Ranger. But once he strapped his guitar on, he was in full rock mode. Halifax's The Heelwalkers were next and they topped the night off with some of the dirtiest eighties metal to ever hit Sydney. Before the bar locked up, a few fights broke out in the back and the RCMP arrived wearing bulletproof jackets.

The guys from Lending Jane were a little drowsy after the long night of music and drinking (I think the shots of tequila are what did them in), so we headed back to our sleeping bags and tried to get our rest before the big finale the next day.

We woke up to a complete breakfast and some of the best hospitality we had ever experienced. The family we were staying with made sure we were well fed, and even shared cigarettes with the guys from Lending Jane. As we prepared for our show that evening, the family cooked us a turkey for Thanksgiving dinner. While the turkey was roasting in an oven, we went to the Steel Workers' Hall to



The Cadre reminds you to drink responsibly.

check out the all-day all-ages concert we were about to play, before returning for turkey.

We ate a big meal, then reappeared at the hall, ready to play. Spincycle Squared were ahead of us, and they freaked out to an eclectic mix of emotional math rock. Lending Jane and I were surprised by the positive reaction they received from the audience.

After Lending Jane ripped up a set of new school punk, avant garde electronic artist Art Damage made an appearance. He started his set by announcing that he was not going to play live music or do a DJ set. He popped in a CD of his dark, mind-altering original music and stood on stage staring at the captivated audience for the half hour duration of his set. At one point he pulled out a prescription bottle and popped what looked like LSD into his mouth. It was an impressive display of performance art.

Cape Breton's most promising young group, The Rudy Huxtable Project, led the audience in a sing-along to a beautiful patriotic song about the island that gave me goose bumps. Through their emotionally charged prog-rock performance and

technical wizardry on their instruments, they proved themselves to be more than worthy to carry the torch of Sydney's music scene to the next generation.

After the finale, everybody headed to the Capri Club on Charlotte Street for the Gobblefest After-Shock Party. Since any band was permitted to play two songs, the party went on well into the bar's extended hours of 3:30 in the morning. This gave me the opportunity to see some of the bands I missed during the weekend, like surf trio Three Piece Suit and Gobblefest organiser Andrea Curry's band, Perfekt Blue. It also gave me a chance to see some favourites like The Rudy Huxtable Project and Tilted again..

The highlight of the party (and perhaps the weekend) was when Dan Curry of Eyes For Telescopes challenged Jay Smith of Rock Ranger to a guitar duel. Backed up by members of Slowcoaster, this battle jam could have gone on all night. The pairing up of local rock hero Jay with Gobblefest guest Dan showed the unity a music scene like Sydney's can create. The Cape Bretoners were warm and inviting, and along with the talented artists, it helped make Gobblefest a weekend to remember.



Art Damage engages the audience in a staring contest.