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The Experts: Zak Pashak and Kerry Clarke

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What we know about . . . Music Festivals

Summary:

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Body:

Who: Zak Pashak

Age: 28

Experience: [Sled Island Music Festival](#) [1] founder and director; opened the live-music hot spot [Broken City](#) [2] when he was 23; was a drummer for the now-defunct band Zakula; recently opened [The Biltmore Cabaret](#) [3] in Vancouver; has attended numerous music festivals, including fests in Edinburgh, Dublin, Melbourne, Yellowknife, Austin and Montreal.

Dream headliner: AC/DC

Who: Kerry Clarke

Age: 44

Experience: Going on 16 years with the [Calgary Folk Music Festival](#) [4] as artistic and marketing director (her title has evolved over time); former program director at [CJSW Radio](#) [5] where she hosts the program Alternative to What?; co-chair of the 2008 Juno Legacy committee; past chair of the [Calgary Professional Arts Alliance](#) [6]; has attended more than 100 music festivals worldwide; was a drummer for GASP, a lo-fi, all-female pop band.

Dream headliners: Tom Waits and Nick Cave

KC: My most influential [festival] experience was the [Vancouver Folk Festival](#) [7] in the early '80s. I discovered all kinds of music. They had Eugene Chadbourne playing his "electric rake" (an instrument made from hooking up an electric guitar pickup to a lawn rake), D.O.A. playing an acoustic set and a woman named Iva Bittová from Czechoslovakia.

ZP: [Pop Montreal](#) [8] influenced me the most. Especially the volunteers they had, how strong and organized it was and how clockwork-like it was run. It was about the bands, but also not about any specific band. It's more about seeing a sampling of stuff, the festival atmosphere and all the people you meet.

KC: Music festivals are good for people with short attention spans and open ears. It's like the weather in Calgary — if you don't like what you're hearing, wait an hour.

ZP: The best way to attend festivals is to have anchor points. If you've got the whole thing set out, you're going to limit your chances of seeing something you didn't expect.

KC: Programming is an art and science. The science part is how many dollars we have; do we have enough blues, Celtic, bluegrass, et cetera? The art part is finding amazing artists that sound fantastic who will bring something really special and blow our minds.

ZP: Fifty percent of the acts we book are local. You need to get bands making friends with other bands and then at least a critical mass of fans at these shows. Bands that go out and see other bands, that's how you get a music scene started.

KC: When artists are collaborating, there's something beautiful happening on stage. Our sessions are arranged marriages, really. You put people together and hope they'll get along. Years ago, we had Paul Kelly from Australia, and from Nova Scotia, Four the Moment, an African-Canadian a capella group with Martin Tielli from Rheostatics. Paul started doing a song about nuclear war, the women's vocals came in spontaneously and Martin did this haunting guitar sound — it was something you had never heard before and you'll never hear again.

ZP: Bands can be your best ambassadors. They tour the world, talk to people and influence a lot more. I've seen it with Broken City. You treat the first 20 bands really well and, all of a sudden, you've got 1,000 more wanting to play here.

KC: The city brags about how festivals put us on the map, yet sometimes you don't feel that welcome. You feel there is more attention paid to the one-offs, like when the Junos came to town.

ZP: I'd love Sled Island to be bigger than the Stampede. Something more locally focused that reflects Calgary and that isn't all about drinking American beer and listening to bad music.

KC: We used to say "beards and banjos," and that meant capital-F folk, really traditional stuff. But now, beards and banjos is really cool indie music.

ZP: The entire music industry is trying to figure out what the hell is going on. Nobody knows. It has completely changed and it's changing as we speak.

KC: The saying used to be, "It takes 10 years to be an overnight success." Now it seems like, with some artists, you just hear about them and all of a sudden they can sell 1,000 to 1,500 tickets.

ZP: Word of mouth is much more powerful now. People look at clips of shows on YouTube, pictures from shows two nights earlier, and what their friends in Winnipeg post as updates on Facebook. It's great for me. I can book bands for a lot less [cost]

who are exciting for people, and they feel like they're ahead of the curve.

KC: Fifteen percent of our budget is from grants. About 60 percent is earned revenue from ticket sales, beer gardens, T-shirts and CDs. The other percentage of that is from corporate donations.

ZP: We have a staff of four people. Three of them are on for four months. I work for the festival year-round and don't get paid. I've given away all the money I had to the festival so far.

KC: People often say to us, "You work all year-round on a four-day festival?" They don't realize how long it takes to get the infrastructure in place. It's like a small city for a weekend, with around 12,000 people a day. There are some towns in Alberta a lot smaller than that.

ZP: I got into this as a music fan. But people really get into bands, and sometimes it almost seems to replace religion for them. There's a difference between being a music fan and a fan of bands. People can start being fanatical about certain bands and miss the point, which should be the music. I need someone to invent a new style of music.

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ARTS AND CULTURE

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.sledisland.com/>
- [2] <http://www.brokencity.ca/>
- [3] <http://www.biltmorecabaret.com/schedule.html>
- [4] <http://www.calgaryfolkfest.com/users/folder.asp>
- [5] <http://cjsw.com/>
- [6] <http://www.cpaa.ca/>
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