



REVIEWS - LIVE

Sled Island 2009

highlights from this year's festival

By Team BeatRoute

JUNE 25

King Khan & the BBQ Show The Legion Up

Returning to his roots, King Khan shed the horn section (though not the dancer, clad in a McDonald's printed dress) and bulky band and surfaced as a duo, with Mark Sultan comprising the "BBQ" portion of his band. Undoubtedly one of the highlights of Thursday night, as the line-up at midnight was well over an hour long, King Khan demonstrated that he does not need flair and spectacle to annihilate a room.



His dirty rock and roll tunes, kept in time with Sultan's relentless multitasking, immediately surged and thronged through the crowd, bringing the critical masses to a frenzy. After a solitary song, it was evident that the lack of stage would become a problem: Sultan's drums were disrupted by falling bodies while Khan himself was knocked about. A plea for decency later, and Khan continued with seemingly little regard to the mess he was leaving behind. It was a glorious example of rock and roll done in an intimate, wonderful way. Indeed, it would have been all but perfect but for the crowd, which repeatedly ignored the metaphorical barrier between performer and audience, to the point where Khan growled into the microphone, "(my amp) is not a personal trampoline, so fuck off, OK?" Still, Khan joked that he would have liked to play until he was kicked out, and there was nary a body that complained. (Sebastian Buzzalino)

Andrew WK The Legion Down

As soon as the King Khan set died down upstairs, multitudes of sweaty bodies rushed downstairs to catch what remained of the wildly entertaining Andrew WK set, which had also packed to capacity the main stage. The audience pulsed with crowd surfers and dancers while the energetic keyboardist and vocalist squirmed and shook between numbers on-stage fans, who delighted in the spotlight.

The set was a token to the power of Andrew WK's performance, something that is often lost on album. His constant movement and antics were, for many, a fantastic close to the evening. By the end, there were more people on stage than on the floor. Even the music was left to chance: as the rhythm track looped in the background, a lucky fan played the melody on the keys while Andrew WK yelped and sung his party anthems deep into the morning. (Sarah Kitteringham)

The Famines The Legion Up

While Japather's bizarre experimental ruminations were transmitted through phones rather than microphones on the stage of the main floor of the Legion, the incredibly loud noise-rock played by the Edmontonian duo reigned the upper floor. The Famines replaced Curtis Santiago in the line-up, and they did not disappoint.

Soon, the cramped space was pouring sweat as the floor shook under the dance of erratic beats. Guitarist Raymond Biesinger surged through the thick crowd, climbing on amps and screaming wildly as he vied for the attention he so rightly deserved. As an insane prologue to what was to

come, the Famines did more than what was required to agitate the gathered crowd. (SK)

Anvil **The Legion Down**

Starting at the ridiculously late hour of "sometime after two," and at a ridiculously late time in their career, Canadian metal underdogs Anvil took the stage to close the Legion's performances for the evening.

Throughout the show, it was difficult not to think of Spinal Tap. After all, here were aging metallers who never quite broke through, for whatever reason. Vocalist and lead guitarist Steve Kudlow was the clear leader, dressed in tight black jeans (no cucumber, though) and a sleeveless black tank. He led the three-piece through a collection of Anvil's storied history, complete and replete with banter between songs. Though certainly a nice touch, some of his stories came off more naive than he perhaps intended, giving the impression that it was someone's grandpa shredding through Sabbath-inspired riffs.

Despite the late start, attendance was pleasantly numbered, which obviously pleased the band. If it were up to them, they would have played well after the kids had to go to bed. (SB)

These Arms are Snakes **The Distillery**

Post-hardcore Seattle quartet These Arms are Snakes effectively warmed up the crowd for Monotonix, a band notorious for incredibly mobile and increasingly physical live shows. And open they did.

Vocalist Steve Snere was a veritable force to be reckoned with as he hungrily prowled the stage looking for outlets through which to express his anger. Amps were climbed, curtains were torn, signs were ripped off walls, and paper towel rolls were streamed into the crowd — followed shortly by his own body — and all the while, the rest of the Snakes did their best to follow in At the Drive-In's patternless footsteps. One of the highlights of the night — not for nothing were they slotted as the "Special Guest" at the Legion on Friday night — These Arms are Snakes were a complicated treat for everyone in attendance. (SB)

The Coathangers **The Distillery**

Second on the bill at the Distillery, the all-female indie noise punk quartet delighted the modest crowd with jangly, shrill guitars, a highly mobile bass, spasmodic keys and talented drumming. Indeed, the gals from Atlanta, Georgia fully demonstrated that, as the tattooed Rusty Coathanger said from behind her kit as she shut down a particularly drunk male fan, "girls can do more than just bake."

On album, the Coathangers' noise punk could potentially feel overwhelmingly whiny at times. But live, up on the Distillery's ample stage, they carried their songs with a bouncy enthusiasm which had many bobbing their heads and tapping their feet.

As the set drew to a close, the girls began to play a simplified version of musical chairs, rotating around the stage swapping instruments for songs at a time. Drummer Rusty Coathanger proved that her energy was not to be held behind cymbals as she hawked and spat vocals while gyrating madly on stage, though not without a strange shyness as she begged photographers "not to take pictures" anymore. (SB)

Gobble Gobble **Bamboo**

As Gobble Gobble set up their stage, confusion ripped through the crowd as plastic toys, Barbie Dolls, and fiber optic lights cluttered the sound boards. Frena himself wore a mask and strapped multi-colored fairy wings to his back. The lights dimmed and a dominating frog croak pulsed through the speakers. Frena held a frog face hand puppet high in the air until the croaks became softer and were completely overpowered by intense beats and distorted lyrics.

In between songs, band member twirled around noise makers which emulated the sound of a UFO arrival. During "Skin of Prophets," Frena used an Etch-a-Sketch with a Fisher Price light-up boom box attached to create the dominating bass line.

"We absolutely loved playing in Calgary tonight, and are anxious to check out more of Sled Island," Frena smiled. "After this we will continue with our tour across the country." Megan Jones laughed alongside him, "The Barbie? That's just for atmosphere." (Kelsey Nightingale)

JUNE 26

Monotonix **Tubby Dog**

Thankfully, the Friday afternoon glistened under clear skies and a delicious sun, as those who lacked the foresight, or time, to show up to everyone's favourite hot dog *resto* were relegated to

the sidewalk on 17th Ave.

Monotonix played deep within Tubby Dog, completely invisible underneath the crowd. But, considering Ami Shalev's penchant for restlessness, even those outside were to catch a glimpse of the band. The sea parted as the band led their exodus, doing their best to cause as much of a commotion on 17th as possible. Full drum kit shining in the afternoon sun, Shalev stood atop a mailbox posing in little more than velour booty shorts and torn knee socks. As the crowd thickened below, he led a countdown, down from ten and back up to four, before diving onto the waiting arms.

Once back inside, playing from the middle of the floor, Monotonix continued to pummel the audience with frenetic behaviour. And in a fit of improvisation, and an ode to that bleach blonde hair style trendsetter, led the entire restaurant in a call-and-response chorus of "Farrah...Fawcett." Sure it was still daylight, and sure it was an unconventional venue, but that is precisely the sort of material legends are made of. (SB)

Battle Snakes Palomino

A homecoming band always draws an enthusiastic crowd, and the Battle Snakes' Matt L Snakes' return to Calgary (formerly of Bogart!) was no exception. Packing the Palomino's basement, partly in anticipation of the venerable Tricky Woo, partly to join the bike party that originated in Vancouver, the near-capacity crowd rose and fell on every one of the Pilsner-drenched, Stooges-inspired, and Queen City-perfected riffs.

Perhaps in their excitement, the trio of Battle Snakes played a sloppier set than they are accustomed to, though sex is always better when it is not perfect. Their set included a Stooges cover, "Your Pretty Face is Going to Hell," as well as favourites from their debut EP, including a rowdy rendition of "Queen City Girls" and the undeniably catchy "Wreck of a Man." In anticipation of Tricky Woo, there could hardly be a better start. (SB)

Quintron and Miss Pussycat The Plaza

Quintron substituted his infamous 'Drum Buddy' for talented Miss Pussycat at The Plaza on Thursday. Sled Island goers abandoned their theatre chairs and swarmed the stage while Quintron was setting up his scientific instruments. "The stuff this guy uses for making music is crazy," one fan smiled.

Quintron, clad in a one-piece, blue jumpsuit sat behind his amplified instrument and shouted out, "give me any organ, and I will play it." Immediately fans began wildly dancing to the electronic synthesized beats. Miss Pussycat rocked her maracas and sang backup to Quintron's faultless voice.

After their debut song, Miss Pussycat let it slip, "United Airlines managed to lose all our equipment so we're playing on..." Quintron quickly interrupted, "...our instruments now!" and threw his hands back on the organ. With his magic fingers madly dancing along the keyboard, his left foot on the crash cymbals and singing intense harmonies, Quintron's synchronicity amazed and stunned everybody. It was slightly disappointing that the performance lacked Quintron's innovative "Drum Buddy," — "It's really difficult to transport," he explained the absence. Quintron did use his "Spit Machine," which is a handheld organ that uses saliva to alter the pitch. Announcing his last song, the audience displayed obvious disappointment, but threw all their energy into engaging in Quintron's electrifying madness. (KN)

Tricky Woo Palomino

Perhaps one of the most widely anticipated acts, not just for Sled Island, but for Canadian music in general, the Montreal quartet finally reunited on stage to the immense pleasure of everyone. Wearing matching white suits, as if they were nothing more than a boy band out to make a quick dollar, Tricky Woo took what Battle Snakes had built that night, destroyed it, and rebuilt it stronger, sleeker, sexier.

All the elements were in place: Andrew Dickson and Adrian Popovich flung licks at each other, basking in each other's solos while Alex Crowe and Patrick Sayers kept the rhythm tight and fluid, the latter indulging in improvised drum solos that centered around an active cowbell.

With hit after hit, including "All Right," "Let the Good Times Roll," "I Need Love" and "Sad-Eyed Woman," it became almost impossible to imagine a world where Tricky Woo would not do this forever. Indeed, the basement in the Palomino would scarcely let them leave after their allotted set. Pumping fists and starting chants, the Montreal four were coaxed back on stage not once, but twice, much to the genuine glee of Dickson. And when he finally said, "tomorrow, at Vern's," between gasps of breath and the house music turned back on, you could guarantee that everyone began to shuffle their plans for Saturday. (SB)

Liars Olympic Plaza

Inevitably, the contest for strongest-set-of-the-day would fall to the last two bands on the bill at the main stage: Liars and the Breeders. Both highly anticipated, it was largely on the strength of frontman Angus Andrew that the Liars were able to take the accolades.

The dynamic trio conveyed their scattered and erratic tunes so interestingly that several photographers both behind and inside the barricade continued to shoot far past the customary three-song limit, in an effort to catch the entirety of the unique performance. Andrew was highly engaging and vigorous, constantly navigating the stage to dance, play guitar, sing and shake. Unfortunately, as is wont to happen at these events, the bill was starting to delay, which meant that Liars had to cut their set short in order to fit the Breeders' performance within the time constraints. (SK)

The Breeders Olympic Plaza

Headlining the only day of "main stage" activities for the festival, the Deal sisters played quite the suitable show. They interacted playfully with the gathering crowd — which never quite seemed to fill out the amphitheatre — as they pumped out the Breeders' signature fuzzy college rock anthems.

Officially granted one of the longer sets for the festival, the Breeders made good use of it, granting the audience their wishes as they played familiar tunes with skill and confidence. Each song was met with a decisive and enthusiastic cheer from fans who came to see one of the weekend's biggest attractions. And as night finally took the stage, forcing amps to comply with noise bylaws, the crowd spilled energetically, scattering across downtown in search of their favourite bands. (SK)

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