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Great sound escape

Rockin' metal veterans mix it up with hip hop and R&B acts during mainstage event

By **LISA WILTON**

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Steve "Lips" Kudrow of Canadian metal legends Anvil performs at Olympic Plaza during the Sled Island Music Festival yesterday. (Lyle Aspinall, Sun Media)

Hundreds of young music fans descended upon Olympic Plaza yesterday for the Sled Island Music Festival's mainstage event.

"I used to be a huge Breeders fan," said Jeff Gerard, who drove from Edmonton to take in the outdoor event, which featured The Breeders as headliners.

"I'm also really excited to see Liars and Biz Markie. I'm really impressed by the line up."

Nineteen-year-old Alisha Martin of Calgary hadn't heard of many of the bands playing yesterday's concert but was curious to check out some new music after getting a Sled Island wristband for her birthday.

"It's a nice, sunny day so why wouldn't I want to be spending it outside listening to cool music?"

In addition to the mainstage bands, the Calgary Sun-sponsored 'Red Square' area featured a small clothing, arts and jewellery vending area and a beer garden.

Calgary's The Summerlad was the first band to hit the stage in the afternoon and played to a small but appreciative group of fans. The group has gone through various incarnations over the years and this may not have been the best one for an open-air festival.

While incredibly talented musicians, their sprawling, feedback-laden soundscapes are better suited to a theatre than the middle of a concrete plaza.

Montreal indie group Malajube were up next and unfortunately there was only a slightly larger crowd there to see them.

It's too bad because the Francophone four-piece are one of the best bands in the country right now.

Their sound is part new wave, part fuzz rock with boisterous melodies and wonderful two and three-part harmonies.

Hopefully more people will check out their longer show tonight at the Hi-Fi.

The event finally started to hit its stride when hip hop legend Biz Markie took to the stage.

While he spent most of his 30-minute set on a stool, he was the one act of the entire event who seemed to truly energize the crowd.

He proved why a lot of today's current crop of hip hop stars don't hold a candle to the genre's pioneers.

Biz showed off his impressive human beatboxing skills, paying tribute to Michael Jackson by performing snippets of Billie Jean and Beat It using only his mic and some very sophisticated breathing techniques.

Props to him for getting a whole lot of white indie kids to throw their hands in the air and declare their love of hip hop.

You would have to be cold-hearted, jaded scenester not to enjoy Biz Markie's hilarious rhymes and his classic hits such as Vapors and Just a Friend.

A great thing about the Sled Island Music Festival is its willingness to throw disparate musical styles together on the same bill. Which is why it wasn't surprising to see Canadian metal veterans Anvil follow sets by Biz Markie and local R&B/hip hop act M5.

Anvil played its first gig 36 years ago and has 13 albums under its belt. There were a handful of fans who looked as if they may have seen the group back when they were in the same league as Metallica and Slayer.

But it seemed most of the crowd was there to gawk at the stars of the excellent and poignant documentary Anvil: The Story of Anvil.

Anvil is actually a pretty rockin' metal band but it's hard to get past some of their dumber lyrics ('Lookin for a bitch in heat, begging for a doggy treat' from the song Mad Dog is just one example.)

Still, it was great to see a band that obviously enjoys itself on stage after experiencing so much disappointment. These guys live and breathe rock and there is no way you can fault them for that.

Evening clouds began to roll in as this year's cool kids on the block, Holy F--- took to the stage. Whatever you think of their moniker, these electronic rockers really do live up to the hype.

New York City's Liars and The Breeders -- best known for their 1993 hits Cannonball and Divine Hammer --wrapped up the show later in the evening.

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