

**Overview for the GREAT BRITISH ROCK AND BLUES FESTIVAL @ Butlins, Skegness, Lincolnshire  
22nd - 24th January 2016     Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive**

As first timers to this prestigious festival, we weren't sure what the 'Butlins' experience would bring. But what a pleasant surprise on all counts!

**Friday**

On Friday evening, after settling into our upgraded apartment (bonus!), we set off to seek the music experiences for the evening, heading for Jaks and the Blues Matters Stage.

We sadly missed the Warrington based band The Black Circles, who had been performing earlier on the Introducing Stage, but from all accounts they hit the spot.

The first band on at Jaks were Leeds based, TC & The Moneymakers playing good honest harp driven house rockin' Chicago blues. The pace lifted as more people drifted into the venue, a great show with a fresh line up, giving an excellent well put together tight sound.

Sadly we didn't manage to catch the rising star Rebecca Downes, who was playing with her excellent band on the Blues Stage. It was Rebecca's turn last year, to play the Introducing Stage which earned her a worthy place on the main Blues Stage this year. From all accounts the lass from the Midlands went down a storm with her powerful vocals and mix of blues and soul. Her second album, 'Believe' is due to be launched in February 2016.

Next up at Jaks were the once seen never forgotten Revolutionaires. Hailing from the Northeast they gave us a lively performance to a packed house, of classic 1950's R&B. Always the ultimate showmen they didn't disappoint.

The final act on the Jaks Stage was Gerry Jablonski & The Electric Band. The classic masters of blues rock with harp driven tones with superb guitar mastering.

**Saturday**

We headed for the Blues Stage for the afternoon to catch the amazing sax player Snake Davies. There was some controversy about the introduction of Jazz artists to the festival, but I have an open mind and there is only a fine line between jazz and blues. Snake Davies was superb and played a rich mix of soul, blues with jazz overtones. He was also supported by a great band.

Next to hit the stage, Lancashire's finest blues men, the Chicago style rhythm & blues band the Stumble. They never give less than one hundred per cent and to me they gave one of the best performances of the whole festival. Fronting the band was Paul Melville on amazing charismatic vocals, Colin Black on excellent and technically brilliant guitar and slide, Ant Scapens on rhythm guitar, Simon Anthony Dixon on the most sexy sax I've heard, Cameron Sweetman on bass and Boyd Tonner on power drums and vocals. Giving us a mix of new material and Stumble classics, with some heavily laced ballads, super slide and sexy sax, they received a standing ovation and did two encores. All well deserved.

We ventured into the Reds, Rock Stage for a touch of the 'blast from the past' with the Crazy World of Arthur Brown. I first saw him in 1968. Not much change, pure theatre!

Time for food and a chance to check out the Introducing Stage. Texas Flood from Wales gave an impressive high energy performance of classic rock, which earned them the public vote to appear on the Rock stage next year.

For the evening session we visited the Blues Stage to catch Sean Webster & The Deadlines. With some great raw rockin' blues, Sean's voice was superb, even though he had a sore throat. With two excellent lead guitars sparking off one another, they were also briefly joined on stage by top class blues man Aynsley Lister, to add to the performance.

Trying to fit everything in was quite hard and we did a quick exit to catch Essex boys LaVendore Rogue at Jaks. They always give an amazing performance and tonight was no exception. With JoJo Burgess fronting the band on vocals and theatricals, Joel Fisk, who's guitar playing expertise has continued to grow in the years I have known him, Stephen 'Cupsey' Cutmore the stalwart of the drums, Rob 'Tank' Barry on bass and Warren Lynn on keyboards. With a sound leaning towards Americana but with a unique performance, they were another highlight to the festival.

We left Jaks in the capable hands of George Shovin & The Radars, to take in the flavour of the past with Hawkwind, on the Rock Stage. Psychedelia met us with the back stage light show and the original synth sounds from the band. It is always strange taking a trip back in time!

We decided to stay at the Rock Stage to see the impressive Aynsley Lister. He gave a seamlessly good performance as would be expected from this award winning performer, but perhaps I might have expected him to be on the Blues Stage rather than the Rock, especially when following an iconic early seventies psychedelic rock band.

## **Sunday**

On the Blues Stage, kicking off the afternoon, were Blue Swamp, but as a duo today. Mike Bowden, as always, had the audience captivated with his dry wit and with the expert guitar skills of Johnny Williamson on electric guitar combined with Mike on acoustic guitar, they played some excellent numbers from their current CD 'Voodoo Soup'. A superb set all round.

A quick dash to catch BabaJack on the Rock Stage. Beckie was in her element vocally on the main stage with percussion on her cajon and bongos. The band gave a terrific performance of roots rock and folk blues. Trevor put his all in playing his guitars, harmonica and vocal input, ably supported by the rest of the band.

Back to the Blues Stage for some jazz. Well Courtney Pine to be exact! An interesting performance with a variety of instrumental input, with a definite jazz infused Caribbean theme, including steel drums! Veering away from 'the blues' had been an issue for some people, but the auditorium was packed and Courtney was given a rousing standing ovation at the end of his set, so perhaps that speaks for its self!

Out to the Introducing Stage to catch the Shrewsbury based Rainbreakers, one of my favourite alternative blues rock bands on the circuit today. They played a brilliant set with high class vocals and musicianship which earned them a place on next year's main Blues Stage.

Taking a break for a couple of hours we then headed back to the Blues Stage for the final leg of the festival. The Della Grants, from Leicester were just up on stage, giving a cracking performance of blues rock to an enthusiastic crowd. This was their debut on the Main Stage, winning the opportunity after appearing on the Introducing Stage last year.

Following were Dr Feelgood who have their loyal followers. We decided to pop into the Rock Stage for a taster of Martin Turner plays Wishbone Ash, prior to the final act of the evening, Wille & The Bandits.

Wille & The Bandits, from Cornwall, now have an amazing following across the country and Europe, their music crosses so many genre's. They are an exceptionally exciting and musically talented band, I would describe their music as roots rock, but with elements of folk blues. Plenty of lap slide and strong vocals from Will Edwards, exceptional bass playing from Matt Brooks on six string and stick bass and backing vocals, with outstanding percussion from the power man Andrew Naumann on drums, and backing vocals. They had a brilliant reception on the Rock Stage and acoustically the venue was perfect for them. I think they will definitely have quite a few more followers after such a charismatic performance, with the highlight of 'Angel', which was played to perfection. A brilliant end to a brilliant festival!

Summing up the festival as a newcomer, I would say it was lucky the weather was good. It is a festival that caters for a variety of tastes and the stages were well able to accommodate the variety that was on offer. The whole experience was enjoyable and there was never that feeling of overcrowding. It will definitely be on my list again for next year!

**Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer**

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