

Review for **CARLISLE BLUES ROCK FESTIVAL @ The Crown & Mitre, Carlisle, Cumbria**
27th 28th 29th September 2019



The Crown & Mitre Hotel was a great venue to hold, what was purported to be, the last **Carlisle Blues & Rock Festival**. If it was to be the last, then what a way to go with a sell out and a line up to die for!!!!

Friday

Kicking off the festival were the Manchester based **Nick Steed 5**. On keys, singer songwriter Nick - better known for his involvement with a host of great musicians - raised the roof, with a class performance from him and the rest of this prestigious band. Excellent sax playing from Kim Nishikawara and faultless guitar from Peter Mason with the added back line of Steve Gibson and John Sandham on drums and bass, provided a round sound with a full spectrum of blues.



Nick Steed 5

Next to take the stage were Irish band **Crow Black Chicken**. The raw rockers and power trio, didn't disappoint with front man Christy O'Hanlon on growling vocals and guitar, Steven McGarth on animated bass and Gev Barrett on drums. A great performance of blues rock, Crow Black Chicken style.



Crow Black Chicken

The **Sean Webster Band** always bring an air of expectation and with a new album 'Three Nights Live' on the table, it was good to hear a re-take of original material. Sean is a magnificent guitarist and vocalist, along with his super competent band. The set wouldn't be complete without Sean's signature song the Eta James classic 'I'd Rather Go Blind' sung to a silent captivated audience, just spine chilling.



Sean Webster Band

One of my personal favourites **Xander & The Peace Pirates** next, to complete the first evening of the festival. From Liverpool they play heartfelt and poignant songs with a message, touching the realms of blues, rock and soul. I heard shades of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young in their performance which was certainly a good model to follow, but it was all done in the Peace Pirates style. Fronting the band on amazing electric guitar and vocals was Keith Xander with brother Stu on acoustic rhythm guitar and Mike Gay on faultless slide guitar, guitar and vocals with Joel Goldberg and Adam Goldberg on bass and drums.



Xander & The Peace Pirates

Saturday

Opening on Saturday afternoon were the sultry **Zoe Schwarz Blue Commotion**, from the South East. With unique vocals from Zoe, with shades of Billie Holiday dripping in, Rob Koral on accomplished guitar and Pete Whittaker and Paul Robinson on Hammond and drums. This all added up to a classic performance and a fresh approach to the 'blues'.



Zoe Schwarz Blue Commotion

The kings of 'jump jive' the **Revolutionaires**, from the North East, were drafted in to replace Guy Tortora who had to cancel, but what a great treat. They always give their all and how anyone could not get the feet tapping is beyond me. With such energy Ed Stephenson fronts the band on vocals, high energy guitar, keys and harmonica and with the other members in the band it was certainly rhythm 'n blues at its best and got the dancers out in force.



The Revolutionaires

The young **Felix Rabin Trio**, all the way from France, gave a great performance as a power trio. As this was my first encounter with this talented band, it was interesting to hear the influences in their music from the greats of the 70's, all done in their own unique style. Some classic full on guitar playing from Felix.



Felix Rabin Trio

Closing the afternoon session, it was good to see the **Jon Amor Band** back on the road again. Singer, songwriter and guitarist Jon, played some of his old material, alongside the showcase for his new album 'Colour Is The Sky'. It was a delight to hear this iconic performer with his band, playing electric and acoustic guitars.



Jon Amor Band

Opening Saturday evening, we were delighted with the harmonica driven **Junkhouse Dog Blues Band**. From Manchester, the animated Luke 'Junkhouse' Shaw fronts the band on vocals and superb harmonica. Playing the best of Chicago blues they are certainly a band you have to watch 'live'. With Nic Elsby on wild guitar, Nick Harris on powerhouse drums with Dave Luvin on bass and double bass, it was good to see this band on the big stage.



Junkhouse Dog Blues Band

A band that needed no introduction were the **Stevie Nimmo Trio**. After some time out for recovery from surgery, Glaswegian Stevie was back on top form. Playing with his distinctive style and vocals that take some beating he wowed the audience. It is always a pleasure to see professionalism at its best and the trio certainly did that.



Stevie Nimmo Trio

The Queen of the blues with the wonderful **Connie Lush Band**. No one commands the audience like Liverpool's own Connie Lush. A magical performance of her classic material, that was just superb. There was bonus in store when she was joined on stage by the amazing Kaz Hawkins, - can those ladies 'party'! Fabulous as always, Connie just reeled in the audience with her charismatic performance and especially her Muddy Waters number 'Mannish Boy', brilliant.



Connie Lush Band

The final band of the evening were **RHR** (Redfern, Hutchinson, Ross). A collective powerhouse band fronted by three top class musicians, in the form of Troy Redfern, Jack J Hutchinson and Mike Ross, all on vocals and guitars, supported by Darren Lee and Jack Browning on drums and bass. All are individual singer songwriters and performers, but came together to give us some raw, rockin' blues with a Southern rock flavour, with slide drenched numbers from Troy to Americana peppered tracks from Mike, with Jack getting down and dirty with gritty rock. With a guest appearance from Stevie Nimmo, it was a brilliant set to end the evening.



RHR (Redfern Hutchinson Ross)

Late Night Jam

Always a lot of fun and tonight was no exception. Joining the house band were Connie Lush, Kaz Hawkins, Matt Long and Felix Rabin to name a few. This went on until the early hours, but some of us needed 'sleep'!!!



The Jam

Sunday

Kicking off the afternoon were the blues-based band **Mike Bowden & A917**. Singer, songwriter and storyteller Mike a Salford lad, but now living in Scotland, fronts the Scottish band on vocals and acoustic guitar. He is ably supported by Les Cowley on electric slide guitar, Martin Rhydderch on keys, Sean Walker on bass and Big Vern Seymour on percussion. They received a well deserved standing ovation at the end of their set after a stunning performance of 'off the wall' blues, mostly self-penned by Mike. A band with true 'entertainment' as their middle name.



Mike Bowden & The A917

We do have some 'superstars' and the **Kyla Brox Band** certainly fit that bill. Winning the UK Blues Challenge, they went on to represent the UK in the International and European Blues Challenges, winning the latter. Singer songwriter Kyla continues to fly the flag for the UK as she and husband Danny will be off to Memphis again, to represent the UK in the acoustic section of the International Blues Challenge in 2020. Her performance this evening was electric and spine chilling as she has the power and the soul for singing the blues as it should be sung. Her band are tight and the numbers were performed in a seamless fashion with Danny Bromley on bass, Paul Farr on guitar and Mark Warburton on drums. Kyla completed her set with one of her very few covers and the hairs on the back of the neck were certainly standing up as she performed the Leonard Cohen number 'Halleluiah'. Powerful is an understatement!!



Kyla Brox Band

It was good to see the **Ian Parker Band** back on the stage. Playing many of his classic numbers and his new take on soulful blues, songwriter Ian fronts the band on haunting vocals and Stratocaster driven blues.



Ian Parker Band

The hidden life of **Andy Fairweather Low & The Low Riders** is certainly an interesting story. From his days with Amen Corner to working alongside Eric Clapton, he has certainly had a varied career. He has now been back on the road in his own right for a good few years and always puts his all into his performances, as he did tonight, even with lack of sleep. He was ably supported by the Low Riders who are Dave Bronze, Paul Beavius and Nick Pentlehow. What a brilliant way to end this superb festival with such an iconic performance.



Andy Fairweather Low & The Low Riders

Well that was it!!! Thanks go to **Nick Westgarth** and the whole of his team for doing such a splendid job. Also thanks to the sponsors who helped to make it happen and to all the bands who made this such a special event. Let's just hope this will not be the last Carlisle Blues & Rock Festival and it will be back in 2020.

Rosy Greer – Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer