

Review for THE TOP SECRET BLUES FESTIVAL 2017 @ The Spa Complex, Scarborough, N Yorks
24th - 26th March 2017 Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive



The sun was shining for the opening of this exciting, well run festival at the splendid venue in the Spa Complex, Scarborough. With two excellent stages at the venue , the Welcome Party was held in the Prom Lounge early evening on Friday, prior to the main stage extravaganza in the Ocean Room.

Friday

We were welcomed in the Prom Lounge by **Tim Aves & Wolfpack**, from Essex, to kick start the evening with a great selection of Howlin' Wolf classics and other masters of Chicago blues. Fronting the band with raw vocals, guitar and harmonica was Tim Aves, plus the master of guitar and slide, the talented Joel Fisk, with the solid back line of Rob 'Tank' Barry on bass and Paul Lester on drums.



Tim Aves & Wolfpack <http://www.timwolfpack.moonfruit.com/>

The first artist on the Main Stage in the Ocean Room was the highly talented **Jon Amor** from Devises. Initially, as a solo set, he played an excellent mix of acoustic and electric guitar, but it wasn't long before he had guests join him on stage. First was Joel Fisk and the pair made a mean duo. Aynsley Lister and Innes Sibun followed and it was a great experience to have four such talented guitarists on stage together .



Jon Amor & Friends <http://jonamor.tumblr.com/>

On the Prom Stage next was talented singer songwriter **Richard Townsend** and the first of his two sets over the weekend. With his own take on acoustic blues and electric blues, he played some superb guitar.



Richard Townsend <https://www.richardtownend.com/>

Back on the Main Stage were **The Producers**, hailing from London, they have been on the blues circuit for over 25 years. With superb classic rhythm and blues they certainly had the audience's feet tapping in the 'old style' of blues.



The Producers <http://www.producersbluesband.co.uk/>

On the Prom Stage and billed as A N Other , we found the award winning guitarist **Aynsley Lister** on a solo set. He is the master of his craft, whether with his band or as a solo artist. An excellent set enjoyed by all.



Aynsley Lister <http://www.aynsleylister.co.uk/>

New to me and from the US, were **Sari Schorr & The Engine Room**, rockin' it up and the last act for the evening on the Main Stage. Sari has burst onto the British blues scene over the past year and the band didn't disappoint. With a push for their new album 'A Force Of Nature' with the cameo track 'Black Betty' , they gave an impressive performance.



Sari Schorr & The Engine Room

<http://www.sarischorr.com/>

Down in the Prom Lounge the 'Jam' was certainly taking shape, with **The Wolfpack** being the host band, they were joined by a plethora of musicians who were playing over the weekend. Magic moments as the musicians gelled together to produce some excellent music.





The Jam

Saturday

Opening the afternoon on the Main Stage was the fabulous **Leila Dee** as an acoustic trio with Glen and Sam on guitars. From Wales, she plays an eclectic mix of blues, gospel, folk and soul. With a fantastic voice Leila performed some blues classics, plus a brilliant version of 'I Can't Find My Way Home'. With shades of Joni Mitchell and Pentangle and the brilliant finger picking guitar she came to the end of her set with the most beautiful version of the Eva Cassidy classic 'Autumn Leaves', just superb.



Leila Dee

<http://www.leiladeemusic.co.uk/>

Down on the Prom Stage, **Dave Saunders and Harry Skinner** from the Producers, performed a good acoustic set of classic blues.



Dave Saunders and Harry Skinner

Back on the Main Stage, a highlight of the festival for me were the **Kaz Hawkins Band**. From Northern Ireland, Kaz and her band gave us a great mix of songs from blues and soul to rock 'n roll and pop. This charismatic and flamboyant performer had the audience in her hand with plenty of audience participation. With songs from Nina Simone, Willie Dixon, Etta James and more she gave a performance that was full of passion, with the strength and power to make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. The band are representing the UK in the European Blues Challenge in Denmark in April. They performed a brilliant take on the Etta James classic 'I Want To Make Love To You', 'rocking' it up and making it totally their own. Fabulous!



Kaz Hawkins Band <http://kzhawkins.com/>

Richard Townsend continued with his second set of the festival, on the Prom Stage.

Another exciting treat on the Main Stage were the Liverpool band, **Xander and the Peace Pirates**. They are Keith Xander on lead guitar and vocals, Stuart Xander on guitar, Mike Gay on slide guitar, guitar and vocals, Joel Goldberg on bass and Adam Golsberg on drums. Their music swings from bluesy Southern rock to Americana, but really has a distinctive sound of its own. Show casing many tracks from their new album they performed the brilliant 'Dance With The Devil' with plenty of superb slide guitar. They also played a great bluesy 'Red House' highlighting both superb lead guitars and an epic 'Searching For The Light' finishing with 'Crosscut Saw'.



Xander and the Peace Pirates <http://www.xanderandthepeacepirates.com/>

With a great swing sound, **Half Hand Hoodo Blues Band**, from York ripped it up on the Prom stage.



Half Hand Hoodo Blues Band <https://www.facebook.com/HalfHandHoodoo/>

Vince Lee's Big Combo, based in the South West, were joined on harmonica, by the maestro **Tom Cocks** on the Main Stage. With a mix of blues and jump jive, they paid tribute to the late Chuck Berry. With well put together blues shuffles and excellent harp playing and vocals, they played foot tapping blues.



Vince Lee's Big Combo <http://www.vinceleebigcombo.co.uk/>

Blues player **Johnny Dickenson**, from Northumberland, was back performing after a long break. As one of the founder members of Paul Lamb & The King Snakes, he took us on a journey with classic blues and excellent slide guitar.



Johnny Dickenson <http://mazzycranks.com/johnny/>

Another highlight for me on the Main Stage, were **LaVendore Rogue** from Essex. They are undoubtedly one of the most interesting and exciting bands on the circuit today, with their own take of alternative blues inspired Americana - but you really can't put these guys in any 'box' as their music is 'LaVendore Rogue' and speaks for its self. The flamboyant JoJo Burgess fronts the band, giving out fantastic vocals, aided by Joel Fisk who also plays some 'mean' guitar - electric and slide. Stephen 'Cupsey' Cutmore continues to keep the rhythm in check on drums and percussion, along with the cool Rob 'Tank' Barry on bass and Warren Lynn on keys. They were joined on stage by Jon Amor adding some superb guitar work. Playing a mix of numbers old and new, they were certainly one of the crowd pleasers at the festival.



LaVendore Rogue <http://lavendorerogue.com/>

On the Prom Stage the brilliant acoustic guitar players **Karl Moon and Dave Smith**. They were joined on harmonica by **Tom Cocks** and played some excellent classic blues.



Karl Moon and Dave Smith with guest Tom Cocks

The final act for Saturday on the Main Stage were the popular choice of the **Aynsley Lister Band**. With jazz influences in the blues genre, the musicianship was superb with faultless guitar solos. Joel Fisk was invited to guest, with his excellent slide guitar. Aynsley's final number of the evening is something of a trademark, Prince's 'Purple Rain', brilliantly played and sung.



Aynsley Lister Band <http://www.aynsleylister.co.uk/>

Another well put together All Star Jam on the Prom Stage completed the evening.

Sunday

Kicking off the afternoon on the Main Stage were **Tortora & Tyzack** and fantastic acoustic duo. They performed a brilliant set, both are class musicians in their own right, with guitars and vocals combining their own take on blues and Americana, A charismatic performance, engaging with the audience gave them a well earned encore.



Tortora & Tyzack <http://www.guytortora.com/>

A treat on the Prom Stage in the form of **Mumbo Jumbo**. From Worcestershire they form a unique trio with Oliver Carpenter - who is at the forefront of the Upton Blues Festival - on trumpet and percussion, Chris Lomas on bass and ukulele and Phil Bond on keys. They all take the lead on vocals. With music described as 'rootsy, bluesy, goodtime' they certainly gave enjoyment to the audience with their unique sound.



Mumbo Jumbo <http://www.mumbo-jumbo.biz/>

Back on the Main Stage a new name to me, the **Lauren Housley Band** from Manchester. With a mix of country, soul and Americana the five piece gave a pleasant performance with the lovely voice of Lauren at the forefront.



Lauren Housley Band <http://www.laurenhousley.co.uk/>

Tom Attah & Mat Walklate got down and dirty on the Prom Stage with a great acoustic blues set. Mat is a master harmonica player, with Tom adding the rootsy blues guitar and vocals, with a dash of humour. What a pleasant way to spend the afternoon.



Tom Attah & Mat Walklate <http://www.tah-uk.com/> <http://www.matwalklate.co.uk/>

Opening the evening session on the Main Stage were **The Jar Family**, with music described as 'Industrial Folk'. From the North East they gave us some great entertainment with folky, swampy roots. The six are all great musicians in their own right, but with a diversity of strengths and music styles it provided a refreshing mix.



The Jar Family <http://thejarfamily.com/>

On the Prom Stage, another highlight for me was the brilliant **Miles Gilderdale** on guitar and vocals, supported by bass, drums and keys. A fantastic set of blues and funky blues, a true professional musician. He invited guest Aynsley Lister to the stage for a few numbers, adding to this excellent performance. I hope we will see more of Miles during the year, he is certainly one to look out for!



Miles Gilderdale <https://www.milesgilderdale.com/>

Next on the Main Stage was American roots singer songwriter **Bronwynne Brent**, from the USA who was born and raised in the Mississippi Delta. On vocals and acoustic guitar, she was ably supported by electric guitar and upright bass. She 'unites all the best elements of Southern American roots music, and ties these many different influences into a sound that's both comforting and refreshing.' which I think says it all. An excellent performance.



Bronwynne Brent <https://www.bronwynnebrent.com/>

The final act on the Main Stage were one of my all time favourite bands, **Wille & The Bandits**. They cannot be categorised as they cross the boundaries of so many genres, with elements of blues and roots rock falling into the 'alternative', they have a freshness of sound which sets them apart with their own distinctive style. Will Edwards fronts the band on exceptional guitar and lap slide with raw and passionate vocals, with Matt Brooks on six string bass and also bespoke upright bass playing some breathtaking solos and finally superb percussionist and drummer, award winning Andrew Naumann. Playing a mix of numbers from previous albums and from their fantastic current album 'Steal' they set the audience alight with a standing ovation at the end of the set and deservedly so. A band that is once seen ... never forgotten!



Wille & The Bandits <http://www.willeandthebandits.com/>

The finale party down in the Prom Lounge was hosted by **Tom Attah & The Badman Clan**. What a great way to end this fantastic festival with great music and a whole lot of fun - and Tom and the band certainly gave us that. Classic blues with an edge.



Tom Attah & The Badman Clan <http://www.tomattah.com/>

A fabulous finish yet again for what had been a brilliantly well run and friendly festival. The weather was fabulous and the venue was superb. Thanks go to **Mark Horsley** and his band of volunteers and the sponsors who have made this excellent sell out festival possible. Roll on next year!

Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer

<http://www.facebook.com/lancsbluesarchive>