

Review for THE TOP SECRET BLUES FESTIVAL 2018 @ The Spa Complex, Scarborough, N Yorks
16th - 18th March 2017 Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive

TOP SECRET
BLUES Festival 2018
Spa Ocean Room
SCARBOROUGH
Friday 16th - Sunday 18th March 2018

Despite the cold and wild wind, the opening of this exciting, well run festival at the splendid venue in the Spa Complex, Scarborough was a resounding success. 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

Hosting the Welcome Party on the Prom Stage were **Mumbo Jumbo**. The trio from Worcestershire were Oliver Carpenter on trumpet and percussion , Chris Lomas on bass and ukulele and Phil Bond on keys. With a unique vauderville take of the blues, their music is described as 'rootsy, bluesy, goodtime', all taking the lead on vocals. A very entertaining band and popular with the audience with their unusual sound.



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

Steve Whalley opened on the Main Stage in the Ocean Room as a trio. With a mixture of Americana, blues and rock 'n roll giving some great vocals with his own unique style.



Steve Whalley <https://www.facebook.com/Steve-Whalley-131358276973290/>

Back in the Prom Lounge **Chris James** treated us to his well presented acoustic roots set with Delta blues flavour.



Chris James <https://www.facebook.com/chrisjamesbluesmusic/>

The dynamic **Elles Bailey** and band were next on the Main Stage. Elles has been raising her game over the past year with the release of her successful album 'Wildfire'. An excellent set with Elles on vocals and keys giving a mix of blues and Southern rock, fantastic vocals and musicianship from the whole band.



Elles Bailey <https://www.ellesbailey.com/>

The final band on this evening were the iconic **Climax Blues Band**. This six piece bands first incarnation dates back to 1967. The line up has changed over the years, with the present having members George Glover on keyboards and backing vocals, Roy Adams on drums and Lester Hunt on guitar and backing vocals, all remaining from the 1980's. With Neil Simpson on bass from 1991, Chris Aldridge on saxophone and Graham Dee on vocals from 2012. A superb set with funky blues overtones and one of the highlights of the festival for me.



Climax Blues Band <http://climaxbluesband.com/>

Saturday

First band to grace the Main Stage today were **Jen Lowe** and band. A very jazzy blues set with upright bass, guitar and drums with Jen on wonderful vocals.



Jen Lowe

Taking the levels down on the Prom Stage was the young and talented **Stoney Broke** aka Jake Scott. The Scottish, blues and soul singer songwriter, defined his musical talent with an eclectic mix of acoustic numbers which were very well performed.



Stoney Broke <https://www.facebook.com/stoneybrokemusic/>

Up on the Main Stage **The Mighty Boss Cats** fronted by Richard Townsend, performed a rich mix of Americana with added stomp and holler and a sound not unlike that of Dire Straits.



The Mighty Boss Cats <https://www.richardtownend.com/>

Johnny Dickinson performed some class blues on electric guitar and slide on the Prom Stage.



Johnny Dickinson <https://www.facebook.com/Johnny-Dickinson-572291359532861/>

Another highlight of the festival were the amazing **Stumble**. They are a superb Chicago style blues band fronted by the charismatic Paul Melville on excellent vocals, Colin Black on exceptional lead and slide guitar, Simon Anthony Dixon on super sax, Ant Scapens on guitar, Cameron Sweetnam on bass and the powerhouse of Boyd Tonner on drums. They played a repertoire of old Stumble classics from previous albums plus new material from the excellent current album 'The Other Side'. They certainly gave it their all, with a worthy performance, putting the Stumble in a class of their own. Just brilliant!



The Stumble <https://www.thestumble.com/>

Rockin' it up, down on the Prom Stage were **Backwater Roll Blues Band**. From Southampton, these guys played a blinding set of harmonica driven Chicago blues. With excellent vocals and superb guitar work. Certainly a band to watch out for.



Backwater Roll Blues Band <https://www.facebook.com/Backwater-Roll-Blues-Band-1395560240708254/>

Welcome the **Midnite Johnny Band** to the Main Stage. From Florida John Morana fronts the band as Midnite Johnny. He has worked extensively throughout his native USA and has established a reputation as one of South Florida's most powerful Blues and Rock guitarists. A lead/slide guitarist and vocalist he was ably supported by Norm Helm on bass with special guests of Paul Burgess (10cc) on drums and Adrian Gautrey (Atomic Rooster) on keys. A powerful set with a mix of classic blues covers.



Midnite Johnny Band <http://www.midnite-johnny.com/>

Richard Townsend performed a solo acoustic set on the Prom Stage

Back on the Main Stage **Kyla Brox**, with her full band, performed an engaging set with jazz, blues and soul. Always a superb vocalist and flautist, Kyla is something special along with her talented band. Performing many self penned numbers and finishing with the iconic Leonard Cohen number 'Hallelujah' it was certainly a memorable performance.



Kyla Brox Band <https://www.kylabrox.com/>

Now for a bit of New Orleans piano madness with the wizz on the keys **Dale Storr**. Great boogie woogie down on the Prom Stage from this classic player.



Dale Storr <http://www.dalestorr.com/>

Some funky grooves from the talented Greg Coulson Band. Certainly another highlight for me. Blues with an edge with some great blues shuffles. A superb band with a big future.



Greg Coulson Band <https://www.gregcoulson.co.uk/>

The Jam on the Prom Stage was a great success with guest spots from Kyla Brox, Greg Coulson



The Jam

Sunday

Opening today on the Main Stage was Bronwynne Brent followed by another set from Dale Storr on the Prom Stage.

On the Main Stage were the SpikedriverS a fantastic stomp and holler band providing great entertainment. Fronted by Ben Tyzack on guitar with the charismatic Constance Redgrave on bass and Maurice McElroy on drums. A fabulous set with guest Guy Tortora. Weird and wonderful country blues with the addition of a washboard to add to the mix.



The SpikeDriverS <http://www.spikedrivers.co.uk/>

Providing their individual take of rootsy blues were **Walklate & Fuschi** on the Prom Stage. Matt Walklate is a master class harmonica player, with the Sicilian Paolo Fuschi, providing guitar wizardry. Both do vocals as well as administering a great sound as a duo.



Walklate & Fuschi <http://www.matwalklate.co.uk/mat-paulo.html>

A treat for the Main Stage with the return of **David Migden & The Twisted Roots**. Their absence on the UK circuit has been missed. They are a highly individual band, playing self penned jazz blues, mostly taken from previous albums 'Killing It' and 'Animal And Man'. David Migden fronts the band with his amazing deep velvet voice and teased the audience with the likes of 'Reverend Jack Crow', an off the wall tongue in cheek ditty not unlike a Zappa number. They are a unique band with a sound that is totally their own, so well worth a catch if you can.



David Migden & The Twisted Roots <http://www.davidmigden.com/>

Tortora & Tyzack played an excellent acoustic set on the Prom Stage, always great entertainers as a duo.

Reaching to the stars on the Main Stage, were the amazing Sussex based **Catfish**. This high calibre blues band are causing a stir in the blues world here in the UK. They are a cut above the average blues band, giving us Hammond drenched blues and epic guitar solos. Paul Long fronts the band on keys and vocals, with the young and talented Matt Long on guitar and vocals, ably supported by Dusty Bones on five string bass and Kevin Yates on drums. Paul and Matt have great voices and both took the lead on vocals playing a number of tracks from their current album 'Broken Man' along with some blues classics.



Catfish <http://www.catfishbluesband.co.uk/>

To finish of the evening and the wonderful festival were the highly acclaimed Danish band **Thorbjorn Risager & The Black Tornado** . As a six piece with brass and keys they were fronted on main vocals and guitar by Thorbjorn Risager. They played a mix of blues, Americana, boogie and a dash of funk, certainly one of the highlights of the festival. Great showmanship from the whole band with fantastic musicianship from all the players.



Thorbjorn Risager & The Black Tornado <https://risager.info/>

A fabulous finish for what had been a really well run and friendly festival. The weather could have been a problem, but once settled into the superb venue we were all was warm and cosy. Many thanks go to **Mark Horsley** and the band of volunteers for all the hard work and to the sponsors who made this excellent festival possible. <http://scarboroughbluesfestival.org.uk/>

Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer

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