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Last Saturday Was One of the Best Madison Music Experiences I've Had

BY RICK TVEDT



PHOTO BY CHRIS TAYLOR

September 20, 2014, will go down in my book as one of the best local music experiences that I've ever had. The occasion was Madison's second BandSwap celebration. Exactly what it sounds like, Madison is swapping bands with Fort Collins, Colorado. Stella Luce came to town on Friday, September 19, and made a live-in-the-studio appearance at 105.5 Triple M. Earlier in the day, Madison Arts Commission co-chair Chris Taylor appeared on WORT to promote BandSwap. It's great to have local radio support.

But Saturday was the real kicker beginning at 11 a.m. with an event named SynchroniCITY, a panel discussion on "The Intersection of Music, Innovation and Technology." Some forty people turned up at the Central Library to take part (pictured below). The discussion was led by the library's Guy Hankel, whose efforts with the Yahara Music Library (a downloadable local music library) have been so successful. Also participating were local musician Beth Kille, Mike Bailey from Madison Media Institute, Preston Austin from Murfie (an online marketplace for recorded music) and Ankur Malhotra, co-founder of Amarrass Records which is based in India and in the U.S. The discussion was quite spirited with ample audience interaction.



PHOTO BY RICK TVEDT

The focus then shifted to the second event of the day, a simultaneous CD-release event for four bands that were chosen from nearly forty submissions. The rain interfered for a time, so only two bands were able to perform. Sam Lyons and his band (which featured two family members, pictured below) ran through an excellent set of soul-infused pop, a perfect blend with the emerging sun. Mojo Radio followed. Their driving blues-rock was well-received by a crowd that grew as Badger football fans made their way downtown. Fronted by the twin attack of Adam Ziertan on harmonica and vocals and guitarist extraordinaire Jason Peterson who both turned in inspired performances. There will likely be a make-up event for the Wells Division and I Saw the Creature to allow them the opportunity to vie for a performance slot at the 2015 Madison Area Music Association Awards, which one of the four groups will receive.



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There was a break in the action until the final event of the day, the BandSwap showcase at the Frequency at 9 p.m. In the interim there was a private discussion held at the Brink Lounge to welcome Dani Grant, the executive director of SpokesBuzz, the organization that runs BandSwap from Fort Collins. This is a unique time in Madison's history, especially for the arts and music and the assembled city, entertainment and music representatives had a passionate two-hour conversation. This will spawn an ongoing discussion to coordinate action in the local music economy, especially as it related to the development of the East Washington corridor.

On to the Frequency. I've been to untold local music events, and I have to say that this was the most fun I may have ever had. Last year's BandSwap representative Sexy Ester opened the show with their high-energy rock led by the unbelievable vocal prowess of Lyndsay Evans. Notably, the band played some new material, one of which, "Lovesick," was very, very good. Sexy Ester, for as long as they've been around now, are really just coming into their own. Drummer Paul Kennedy, who recently returned to the fold, gave them noticeably more power.

Stella Luce followed, led by another powerhouse female vocalist, Alana Rolfe. Rolfe also plays violin and used a harmonizer and other treatments to create some powerful and effective sounds. Equally interesting were the sounds coming from guitarist Tim Massa who applied atmospherics to the band's complicated rock music. Rolfe was unstoppable with her wide vocal range and commanding stage presence. Stella Luce's set was very well-received by an appreciative Madison crowd.

Lords of the Trident (as Madison's BandSwap representative, they will travel to Fort Collins in October with bands from eight other cities) are fast becoming one of Madison's favorites. They play metal but add so much humor and showmanship. Their music has become an exercise in crowd participation. They manage to simultaneously poke fun at the genre while delivering it through well-executed original songs. Vocalist Ty Christian is masterful. Brandishing a different medieval prop almost every song, some of which were flaming, he commands the stage. His between-song banter is hilarious. LotT also played new material that has never been heard while managing to get the very enthusiastic crowd to sing along. That's a feat that even international rock stars can't always achieve. At one point Christian brought the members of Stella Luce onstage, made them kneel, adorned them with various armor and helmets and knighted them as loyal minions. I laughed from the start of their set to the end while sufficiently rocking my soul out. Kudos—an epic performance.

This was an important event for Madison. The support given by the City and the Madison Arts Commission is a watershed moment in the evolution of Madison as a music destination. Forget those silly polls and lists that rank us so high nationally—we still have a long way to go, but the opportunities have never been so golden.