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Festival International from the inside

Chere Coen

Thursday, March 27, 2008

Festival International de Louisiane brings some of the best and most popular artists from the francophone world to Lafayette each April, but some of these performers only hail from French-speaking countries.

Such is the case of The Duhks, who don't sing in French, being from Winnipeg, Manitoba, but they meet the criteria all the same. Lucky for South Louisiana audiences these five tattooed 20-somethings playing fresh acoustic music that ranges from folk to rock and everywhere in between are a hot new sound throughout North America.

Their albums merge elements as diverse as soul, gospel, Brazilian samba, Irish and old-country string music, and it's almost a given they will add zydeco to their Louisiana appearances.

The band consists of fiddler Tania Elizabeth, guitarist Jordan McConnell, banjoist Leonard Podolak and percussionist Scott Senior. Vocalist Jessee Harvey left the band last year to pursue other musical endeavors, but Sarah Dugas of the Canadian folk band Madrigaia has joined the show.

The band has won many music veteran admirers; their self-titled album in 2005 was produced by Béla Fleck, and other fans include David Crosby, Dolly Parton and Doc Watson. Their haunting video, *The Mists of Down Below*, soared to No. 1 at Bravo! Canada. They have captured one Juno Award with two additional Juno nominations, received two Folk Alliance Awards, an Americana Music Association nomination for Best Emerging Artists and a Grammy nomination for Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal for "Heaven's My Home."

The Duhks perform at 9:30 p.m. Friday, April 25 and 8:30 p.m. Saturday, April 26.

Where

Across historic downtown Lafayette

Tickets

Free

International Fest trivia

More than 1,500 volunteers work to put together this popular community event that celebrates "diversity and the common human experience."

More information

festivalinternational.com

The music

This year's lineup is eclectic, varied and sure to please all tastes, but here are a few recommendations:

Thursday, April 24

Lafayette's Charlene Howard has been creating quite a stir with her recent soulful gospel album, and she opens the festival singing the national anthem.

Sonny Landreth has been hailed by Eric Clapton as one of the best slide guitarists around, and *Offbeat* magazine recently named Landreth the Best Guitarist again. See why this Louisiana performer burns up the stage at 6 p.m.

Four-time Grammy winners The Blind Boys of Alabama join special guests Preservation Jazz Band Horns on stage at 7:45 p.m., following up their collaboration on the album, *Down in New Orleans*.

Grammy nominee Mamadou Diabate is the master of the kora, an ancient 21-string West African harp, and he joins The Racines, a hot new Louisiana band that features Steve Riley on accordion, Feufollet whiz kid Chris Stafford on guitar and Balfa Toujours/Red Stick Ramblers' Kevin Wimmer and Charivari's Mitch Reed on twin fiddles at 9:30 p.m. The Mamadou Diabate Ensemble also perform at other times.

Friday, April 25

Garifuna music blends African and Caribbean aboriginal traditions, and Andy Palacio of Belize was a master. Palacio died this year, but the Garifuna Collective and Umalali will perform a tribute to the consummate performer at 7:30 p.m.

Menwar's music can best be described as traditional Mauritian Sega that goes back to its African roots with a groovy blend. They join Louisiana's Bluerunners, "a great Cajun rock band from Lafayette," according to *American Routes* host Nick Spitzer, at 9:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 26

Winners of the Big Easy Awards for Best Emerging Band of 2007, Vavavoom performs New Orleans gypsy jazz by two Crescent City residents hailing from Bourges, France, at 11:30 a.m.

The Figs of Lafayette offer old-fashioned, three- and four-part harmonies in styles of folk, blues, rockabilly and a cappella at 3:45 p.m. with the help of guitar, bass, drums, ukulele and banjo.

You won't be sitting down listening to Alain-Francois of Quebec at 8 p.m., who incorporates fiddle playing, a variety of drums and even a bedpost in his rousing concerts that have taken his native province by storm.

Put on your dancing shoes at 10:15 p.m. and prepare to move to Yerba Buena, a hot Latin band whose acclaimed albums have been nominated for Grammys and performed on Conan O'Brien.

Sunday, April 27

Montreal's Les Breastfeeders have won numerous awards for their frenetic rock 'n' roll. Since 2006 the band has burst into the international arena and fest-goers will see why they are the talk of the music community at 3:30 p.m.

Hot off his recent Grammy win, in which he spearheaded creating the Cajun and zydeco category he won

in, Terrance Simien & the Zydeco Experience tear up the stage with their pumping beat at 5:15 p.m.

The food

It goes without saying that Lafayette is a culinary hotspot, the “Hub City” of all things Cajun and Creole, so you won’t go wrong trying just about any food at the Festival.

But here are 10 places not to miss.

T-Coon’s. A favorite lunch spot downtown and one of the best places to enjoy a true Cajun breakfast, try the crawfish étouffée since T-Coon’s is known for its authenticity.

Poupart’s. This real French bakery and boulangerie creates wonderful things with dough, such as crawfish pistolettes, which combine étouffée with a delightful pastry shell.

Zeus. A popular Lafayette restaurant chain, you can choose between chicken, gyro or falafel pitas with baklava for dessert, and you can’t go wrong with any of them.

Don’s Seafood. This Lafayette landmark restaurant will be serving up seasonal crawfish fettucini with bread pudding for dessert.

Masala Indian Kitchen. A newcomer to the Lafayette restaurant scene—although Lafayette is home to a vibrant Indian community—try the combo plate that offers a variety of Indian foods, which can also be served vegetarian.

Norbert’s. You can’t visit Acadiana and not sample boudin, and Norbert’s is happy to supply some of the best.

Lagneaux’s. Don’t let the idea scare you. Be adventurous and try the fried alligator.

Antler’s. Crawfish macque choux combines two wonderful South Louisiana tastes.

Deano’s. Some of the best pizza in town comes from Deano’s, and they will be offering a variety at the festival. Take your pick.

Louisiana Passion. Yes, there are lots of crawfish entrees to recommend here, but it’s the season and you’re in Cajun Country. Try the crawfish tamales for something new and different.

[Click here for the full schedule.](#)