

Wirral Folk Festival. 4th to 7th June 2015.

At Whitby Sports & Social Centre, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
CH65 6QF

This was the 11th year for the festival, and it is now established as one of the major festivals in this part of the world. It is always a limited gamble for any festival organiser to attract enough customers to pay for the artist's fees. After the success of last year's festival, this obviously gave them the confidence to book bigger names and bands to fill the seats. No easy task, because you have to keep an eye on the ever changing pulse of folk music. After the 2014 festival, I did wonder if they would be able to top that. Well they have, and full marks must go to John and Angela Owen and their team. They work very hard, as it takes a full 12 months to organise an event on this scale. Everything ran like clockwork (or it appeared to) – well done indeed, I could not fault any thing. The selection of guests booked meant there was something to suit all tastes. For me, one of the joys of the festival is that it's all on one site, and all 3 main stages are in easy walking distance, plus as the venues are all indoors, it does not matter if the weather is inclement!

The festival started on **Thursday** evening with the Hungry Horse FC 'Sing in the Festival' open mic night. This year it was more organised with 3 main spots by local artists Mel Barratt and Dave Russell, and also Wilcox & Hulse from the potteries. Plus a good selection of floor singers.

Friday...

Even while a lot of the campers and caravans were still arriving the festival got under way from 10:30am onwards with a variety of concerts by 'fringe' artists, mostly local singers, but neither less, the standard of such was very high. The first concert in the main hall featured top of the bill 'Simply Dylan' by the John O'Connell band. It was pleasing to see a lot of very talented young musicians in his band taking the stand. Also in the concert were Elbow Jane, Kieran Goss, and Anna Shannon. All gave excellent performances.

Saturday....

Fiddlestone opened the afternoon concert in the main hall. Then followed by a nice set from Eilidh Grant, a singer I had not heard before. Followed by Sunjay, and Drop The Floor, before headliners The Houghton Weaver took to the stage.

The evening concert found Other Roads opening for Richard Digance, who I have to say, was absolutely brilliant. His professionalism shone through as he held the audience in the palm of his hand for just over 1 hour. The headline act was Cara Dillon and her band. Sorry to say but, I was mildly disappointed with her performance. For a 'top line' band she did not come up to scratch for me. It was either poor microphone technique by Cara, or the sound engineer had not got the balance quite right with guitars overpowering the vocals, I was struggling to make out the words to her songs. Pity really because she could have been very good. After the main concert the floor was cleared for some late night skiffle / rock from the Cheesecutter till 12.45am.

Sunday....

Wow what a day! The afternoon concert started with a 30mins spot from Kim Lowing & the Greenwood opening for Harvey Andrews, followed by a superb set from Merry Hell, folk rock at its best in my opinion, this band can do no wrong. After the break the ever popular, Chris While & Julie Mathews finish the afternoon nicely.

The Evening concert lived up to its promise to be a 'night to remember'. It was folk rock nearly all the way. Merry Hell opened the evening with another fabulous set. Next up was Reg Meuross, a fine singer-songwriter. Next was a 1 hour set from Blackbeard's Tea Party. What a phenomenal band, with a performance to match. The band made good use of the full sized theatre stage, and with energy (wasted on the young!!) they moved around the stage like Meerkats' on Red Bull! The musicianship was superb. The band played their hearts out, the crowd bayed for more.

If the concert had ended there and then it might have been enough, but to follow was Fairport Convention. I think I felt like I had died and gone to heaven. After the raffle Fairport took to the stage in a very relaxed manner. Sitting in a line across the front of the stage with Gerry Conway in the middle playing to my surprise

his very simple beat box and electric pad symbols. You felt like they were playing just for you. Needless to say they sounded fantastic with a set consisting of a lot of new songs mixed in with some old favourites. After about 1hour and 25mins (plus an encore) the evening finished with everyone feeling well satisfied, - to say the least!

If I get to go to another festival this year, it will surely feel like an anti climax. It doesn't get any better than this.

Or does it? – See you next year.

Peter Massey.