

We Went to “The Other Big Apple” to Experience Canada’s Weirdest Experimental Music Festival

August 5, 2016 [Matt Bobkin](#)



HSY, all photos by author

Too often, summer music festivals are often punctuated by unbearably long lines, even more unbearable crowds, and copious amounts of branding. But in the municipality of Meaford, Ontario (nicknamed "The Other Big Apple" for its multiple orchards), two-and-a-half hours north of Toronto, the only sign that we had reached our destination was a single glowing mailbox down a winding, unlit path, with "The Funny Farm" pasted in foam lettering.

Upon entering the grounds, and heading to the main stage, we were greeted by *The Gongulator 2*. A collaboration by Detroit-based artists Cotton Museum and Apetechnology, it featured electronic noise, a man banging gongs, a video of pulsating human flesh, and the *coup de grâce*, a remote-control car, attached to which was an inflatable tube man with a gigantic skull mask head and a flowing, golden wig. The crowd bowed in adoration of this skeletal Jesus; when it tipped over, a horde of new subjects rushed to get the mechanical deity back on its feet... or wheels, as it were.

Welcome to [Electric Eclectics](#), Canada's weirdest small music festival.



AH MER AH SU

Started by Chris Worden and Gordon Monahan in 2006, the experimental music, sound art, and media festival takes place on Monahan and Laura Kikauka's Meaford farm every August long weekend. With alumni including American electronic pioneers [Silver Apples](#), former Can lead singer Damo Suzuki, California metal-influenced folk singer-songwriter Chelsea Wolfe, and experimental rapper [Mykki Blanco](#)—the latter whose now-legendary 2015 set included a 20 minute break while she secured drugs from all-too-gracious audience members—it's clear the organizers are not afraid of out-of-the-box programming.

Though it runs the same weekend as sponsor-heavy festivals like Montreal's [Osheaga](#) and Toronto's [VELD](#), Electric Eclectics is significantly more affordable and economical. There's only two food options (a barbecue food truck and a veggie samosa table), lineups for entry and washrooms are virtually non-existent, and even at doors, a full three-day ticket will only set you back a mere \$85 (camping included, with a \$2 suggested donation for showers).



While this year's lineup spanned a diverse array of genres, many of the acts would have had a hard time fitting in on more conventional bills. American no wave icons Lydia Lunch and Weasel Walter performed their spoken word collaboration "Brutal Measures," the former's venomous, striking poetry touching on working class alienation and the existential pressure of human existence, punctuated by the latter's furious, scattered drumming. Oakland-based self-described "trans pop princess" [AH MER](#) [AH SU](#) delivered one of the best performances of the weekend, endearing herself to the crowd with her shimmering, electronic pop. On the other end of the musical spectrum was Toronto sludge punks [HSY](#), whose charismatic lead singer Anna Mayberry spend the majority of the set wandering into the crowd dazed and yelling.

The festival also provided a testing ground for plenty of artistic experimentation. New York-based [Maria Chavez](#) spun gorgeous classical music out of one speaker and ear-splitting crackles out the other. During Oakland folk duo [Faun Fables](#)' set, guitarist Nils Frykdahl—a burly, dress-clad guitarist with the hair of a metal legend—ambled around playing the flute as if in a medieval court. Later that night, he was seen traversing the farm with his three daughters in tow, proof that EE is truly for everyone. Closing the main stage was NYC experimental stalwart [Lary 7](#), who brought a pair of collaborators onstage for a scattered, improvised jam session, which included scribbling on an electromagnetic soundboard and an overwhelming usage of clock sounds.



The oddities and absurdities extended beyond the music too—in an abandoned tractor trailer, attendees could watch video artist Maya Ben David's "We've Met Before," which paired a slowcore version of traditional Scottish folk tune "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" with distorted CGI anime footage. Towers of stuffed animals and assorted doodads stood proudly in the stage area, and dismembered mannequin heads littered the grounds.

Though the musicians and visual artists may have provided the spectacle, Electric Eclectics' attendees are just as important. Though attendance numbers barely reached the three digits mark, the cabal of costumed eccentrics ranged all-ages from scampering tweens to aging hippies, everyone embracing the festival's "anything goes" mentality. In a discussion with two of my new companions—one a seasoned EE vet and the other a rookie like myself—we realized that EE is as close to a safe space as you can get, judgement-free and unabashedly strange. Attendees were free to dress as they pleased, which included snowsuits and "Hillary For Prison 2016" shirts. Long after the musical performances wrapped up, festival-goers traversed to a tent in the forest for an after-hours dance party until sunrise.

This spirit of unfettered and exuberant acceptance showed in the lineup itself, which transcended genre, gender and race in ways that few other Canadian music events have been able to achieve. In this tumultuous festival market, where festivals disappear into the void just as quickly as they seem to appear, Electric Eclectics has proven itself an institution in the experimental world for yet another year.



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