



Electric Eclectics' Secret Party Makes Good

Funny Farm Meaford, ON on Jul 31 2009

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If you wanted to catch **Holy Fuck** in an outdoor setting this summer, you've had multiple choices of big-time music festivals, from Fuji Rock in Japan to Sled Island in Calgary. But if you wanted to witness Holy Fuck play a tiny stage in the middle of a dark field surrounded by robots, there was just one place to be this past weekend: Electric Eclectics.

The three-day experimental/improv music and arts festival held on a self-proclaimed Funny Farm outside of Meaford, Ont. is just a few hours drive from Toronto in the midst of cottage country yet remains a best-kept secret on the summer concert circuit.

Perhaps that's because apart from HF its "headliners" (such as **Carla Bozulich**, **Katie Stelmanis** and ex-Can vocalist **Damo Suzuki**) are of the off-the-corporate-sponsor-radar variety.

Or perhaps it's because those in-the-know don't want to sing its praises too loudly for fear of upsetting their sacred balance of hippies, hipsters, hippiesters and assorted art freaks with the type of drunken fratboys that ruin every other music festival out there.

Certainly, the low jerk factor proved vital to the success of this fourth annual event — which offered everything that can make an outdoor music festival great (a sense of musical discovery, community, camping) with none of the crap (restrictive beer gardens, overpriced water). Even the EE porta potties were nice.

Having been told by one insider that Electric Eclectics was like "a miniature Nuit Blanche in the middle of nowhere" our car of EE virgins promptly set off Saturday towards an all-night adventure only to get lost down a backcountry dirt road just as darkness fell and the iPod shuffled to its eeriest tracks.

This is the stuff of horror movies, right? City folk in search of mythological pleasure in the woods take a wrong turn to their deaths? We even got misdirected by local gas station attendants. But upon eventual entrance to the Funny Farm, Electric Eclectics unfolded like more of a sci-fi fantasy.

Two roving robots by Detroit's Apechnology greeted attendees, lighting the way to the modest stage where L.A.'s Carla Bozulich (a.k.a. **Evangelista**) and co-conspirator Tara Barnes played hauntingly beautiful guitar/bass songs for other worlds. The duo's sparse performance was capped by an appearance from legendary Kraut-rock vocalist Suzuki, the festival's special guest.

Suzuki's own set, up next, was a freeform exploration of howling drone rock, unleashed into the night skies like celestial communion. The response was wind and rain. As organizers scrambled for tarps, refuge could be found in transport truck trailers-turned-sound and light installations: the "Theremin Pendulum" (created by EE festival founder/sound sculptor/mad scientist Gordon Monahan) is a motorized theremin dangling from the ceiling, screeching and dancing jerkily to the rhythms of bodies as they approach with caution. Ominous.

It was full-on rainstorm for Holy Fuck, but the Toronto electro improv ensemble laid down their feel-good grooves, at first with trepidation but growing into optimistic verve as 100 or so people danced, unafraid. One, wearing a rubber monster mask, turned out to be that infamous drummer, Great Bob Scott.

Holy Fuck's wet set climaxed with the joyously satisfying "Lovely Allen" plus an warm encore. This cleared the skies for after-hours fireworks revelry in the open campground field as the interactive a/v installation Constellation 2 (an amazing solar-powered enclosure of fabric that responds to wind and touch with varying sound and light) transformed into x-rated drive-in theatre. Try that at Virgin Fest.

Sunday's scene was brighter both in mood and music.

Under sunny skies, **Greater Explosives** (a.k.a. Daman Vallies of I Can Put My Arm Back on You Can't) emitted ethereal ambient guitar loops that lingered like daydreams.

Not all the experiments were so rewarding. **The Daisy Tree** was all promise: a harp that played itself in the wind, a dissonant singing saw, then a collapse into caterwaul. Unfortunately, the same vocalist is also part of **Charles Glasspool & The Big Love With 3C84**, a gang as sonically unwieldy as their name and whose new age/new wave jamming was accompanied by video projections of scrolling lyrics as if we were at karaoke and anyone would want to sing along to this mess.

Redemption arrived in the form of London, Ont.'s **Exit 2012** — guitars and noise, joined by an impromptu drummer found in the crowd minutes before showtime and, once again, Suzuki, who was asked to jump up for an encore song but decided to grab the mic at the outset and not let go until he had unleashed more sonic tempests. Their vigorous improv session was both electric and eclectic, the perfect coda to a festival that delivered on its name.

Now go tell two friends. But just two.

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