

Sizzling Friday night at the Blue Wing Blues Festival

Contributed by T. Watts
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UPPER LAKE – Despite the absence of regular bassist Jon Hopkins, the Lake County Blues All-Stars opened the Friday version of the 2008 Blue Wing Blues Festival with a slammin' set of blues featuring great vocal stylings by 1960s legend Mike Wilhelm and Neon, who is rapidly climbing the vocal blues chops ladder.

Working from the songbooks of Freddie King, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, Jimmy Reed, B.B. King and others the All-Stars delivered a solid set. The versatility of Mike Wilhelm's playing was evident as he alternated between rhythm and lead licks. He picked up a National Steel Resonator guitar halfway through the set and gave the crowd ample evidence of why Jerry Garcia called Wilhelm his favorite guitarist.

I can't leave out Jim Williams' contribution. He contributed several stinging solo's which left some folk's open-mouthed. Kudos also to Scott Bowers filling in on the bottom for Jon Hopkins on a moment's notice. If you'd like a little taste of the Lake County Blues All-Stars, they play Blue Mondays at the Blue Wing frequently.

Friday Night headliners, the Ford Blues Band with Patrick Ford and Volker Strifler are connected musically all over the world. Patrick Ford's brothers, Robben and Mark, have made individual high water music marks as well.

To start, the band ripped through three up-tempo harp-driven, guitar-fueled numbers and quickly had the crowd on its dancing feet. Harp man Andy Just was smoking. Bassist Dwayne Pate anchored the bottom pocket while Patrick Ford's beat was cool and steady.

Volker Strifler played and sang amazingly well. His version of Howlin' Wolf's Spoonfull was very authentic. If there had been a vote for the festival's best guitar player, Volker would have been hard to beat. If you ever get a chance, catch this band live. They don't just cook, they sizzle!

T. Watts writes about music and culture for Lake County News.

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