

# LAAFF fills downtown streets with artistic variety

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## Festival Recap

Fairy wings, rainbow-hued hair, pirate attire and other sundry modes of dress adorned this year's Lexington Avenue Arts and Fun Festival. Festival-goers, artists and vendors alike said LAAFF is the most local of happenings in Asheville.

LAAFF ran from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sunday. The three stages, two courtyards, 60 vendors and six bus tours made LAAFF a success, according to PR director Erin Scholze.

"The community really owns it, which is amazing" said Scholze.

The stages, placed at various locations on Lexington Avenue, were the Greenlife Electric stage, the Mountain Xpress Walnut stage and the BoBo Gallery stage.

Each stage offered up a variety of local and national acts, from Pierce Edens to the nationally acclaimed Blue Rags.

"There's no such thing as free time, and I'm not so sure about luck. There's no easy way to break up," sang Shane Conerty and female lead singer Dulci as their band, Now You See Them, played the Mountain Xpress stage.

Listeners at New You See Them show included a couple from Knoxville, Tenn. who came to LAAFF exclusively for the band and for beer, and a baby with a mohawk who split his time between schmoozing with the audience and lead singer Conerty.

Now You See Them, originally from Pennsylvania, were very excited to play LAAFF according to drummer Jason Mercer.

Down the street and a few hours later, Ami Worthen and Jason Krekel of Mad Tea Party ravaged the crowd as various fairy-winged women boogied like zombies alongside men in skirts and face-painted children.

Around sunset at the BoBo stage, acoustic singer-songwriter Angi West captivated the crowd with a voice reminiscent of folk singer Joanna Newsom as fans lounged on the street.

West's breathy, gospel-tinged vocals accentuated the dwindling sunlight and the ambiance it created during the festival.

The cross-legged audience sat in a hush as Mad Tea Party's vocalist smiled near the sound booth.

Songwriter's circle at Liquid Dragon Tattoo's courtyard had the appearance of spontaneity as local songwriters democratically performed acoustic versions of their own music.

"It's just amazing to hear a person with

their instrument and their song" said Rory Carroll, a local performer.

Cello during Ash Devine's haunting performance flowed with Carroll's bluesy voice, while Now You See Them's Conerty brought about an upbeat note.

"I'm so grateful to be a part of this community," Carroll said.

Indeed, community was a dominant theme at LAAFF.

Groups of friends gathered on the street and in front of stages, parents and children conversed with other families, and strangers stopped to talk to not only those dressed outlandishly, but to offer genuine compliments to each other.

The party atmosphere was supported by the nature of the goods being sold.

Booths selling handmade jewelry and local foods were flanked by vendors selling clothes both tie-dye and hand-printed, as well as novelty stands selling paintings and pottery.

One such stand was a man with the bottle cap truck, a mainstay at arts festivals such as LEAF, whose proprietor was wearing a white tailcoat with multi-colored fuzzy craft balls.

The eccentric attire of many of the festival goers fazed none, and were even considered by some to be beautiful.

"The most beautiful thing I saw was a woman with curly hair down to her knees" said Tommy, a local attendee. "She was slow-dancing."

Alongside festival-billed oddities such as bike jousting were many impromptu happenings, a symbiosis of street performances and participating spectators.

Near Spiritex clothing store, a woman played harpsichord for hours while another woman played a silver painted snare drum.

The performance art of LAAFF did not end with musicians. There were at least three people on stilts roaming the festival at their leisure, sometimes stopping to pose with other personalities, and otherwise perpetuating the carnival atmosphere the festival created.

Another of the festival's main draws was the beer.

Eight local breweries supplied LAAFF attendees with enough plastic cups to need "compost only" trash-cans.

The community building reached beyond Lexington Avenue.

Various shops sold scraps of fabric and took donations to support Responsive Education Accessing Creativity for Healing, or REACH, a program for battered women.

LAAFF's impact varies almost as much as the outfits of those who attend, but they all agree on at least one note: Ashevilleans, out-of-towners and artists alike love LAAFF.



Photos by Noor Al-Sibai - Staff Writer

Shane Conerty of Now You See Them, above, performs next to a toddler. Mad Tea Party plays the Greenlife Electric Stage.