

Area's first Christian music festival wows crowd amid rain

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Even with a constant downpour, Christian music fans battled the rain at last weekend's Awakening Christian Music Festival at BB&T Ballpark in Winston-Salem on Saturday, Sept. 26.

Saturday's show was headlined by gospel music icon Kirk Franklin and Christian music band Mercy Me.

"The show was great, but this weather could've been better," said Kevin Joyce, who came to see the band Mercy Me. "I'm glad Winston-Salem has something that Christians can come to as a family and enjoy music."

While many fans huddled underneath the concourse, some fans braved the elements and sat in the stands — some in the field seats — to see and cheer on their favorite acts up close and personal. Everyone seemed to be in great spirits despite the rain.

"The music was fantastic," said Travis Davis, who came out to see Kirk Franklin and Mercy Me with his girlfriend.

Kimberly White said the rain dampened the mood a little bit, but not too bad and was most excited to see one of her favorite bands, Mercy Me as well.

Kirk Franklin, who spoke with The Chronicle last week before the festival, said, "I want to make sure people feel unified, and celebrate a great sense of unity within the community, and I'm very glad to be a part of that." Franklin also touched on his favorite Scripture: Romans 8:28, which reads: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (King James Version)

"They speak to that different place in your life, so for me, I enjoy them all," Franklin said of the many facets of entertainment he is involved with. And his philosophy on life is: "Everything physical and visible is first preceded by that which is spiritual and invisible."

Franklin and Mercy Me had the largest following of the acts that participated in the festival, but every performance was enjoyable and unique, especially Zealand Worship, a Contemporary Christian band, and the Renaissance Choir, which will be at Gospel Fest at the Dixie Classic Fair on Sunday, Oct. 4.

The festival concluded on Sunday, headlined by Jeremy Camp, an ordained minister with over 4 million albums sold.



Carla Fulton, with the Renaissance choir, leads a song during The Awakening Christian music festival at BB&T Ballpark in Winston-Salem on Saturday, Sept. 26. Renaissance, under the direction of Dionn "Maestro" Owen, will be at Gospel Fest at the Dixie Classic Fair on Sunday, Oct. 4.



Gospel music sensation Kirk Franklin pauses while performing during The Awakening Christian Music Festival at BB&T Ballpark in Winston-Salem on Saturday, Sept. 26.

Easton historic marker unveiled

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

The Easton Neighborhood got its own historic marker on Saturday.

The marker, erected by the Forsyth County Historic Resource Commission, sits at the intersection of Woodcote Street and Clemmonsville Circle at a main entrance to the neighborhood. It denotes the origins of Easton as a subdivision built for veterans' housing during Winston-Salem's housing shortage. The 1944 GI Bill gave low-interest loans to veterans and promoted housing construction. Almost identical houses were created to qualify for government-subsidized mortgages. It has since become a diverse, largely minority community.

The ceremony to unveil the marker happened on a rainy day, as residents sat under a tent listening to remarks from Mayor Allen Joines, Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke, Historic Resource Commissioner Linda Dark and Paula McCoy, president of Neighbors for Better Neighborhoods, which has been involved in revitalizing the neighborhood.

City Council Member James Taylor, who represents the Southeast Ward, which Easton is in, said it was the residents that made the neighborhood great.

"I always say that strong families make strong communities that are the backbone of the city of Winston-Salem," he said.

Taylor was born and raised in neighboring Belview. He said it was the people in this area of the city that helped him, and many others, get to where they are today.

"It takes a village to raise a young man or young women, a good village, a good community, and, like I said, Easton was built on that," Taylor said.

The marker also describes the work of the Easton Neighborhood Association, which formed in 1988. The group's president is Robert Leak III, whose late grandfather Robert Leak Sr. was past president of the association. Leak, who was groomed by his grandfather to lead the group, started grassroots organizing when he was 12 years old and became association president at age 19. At the time, he told Joines that Easton would be a turnaround community.

"During that period, when Easton was going through a lot of drug activity, prostitution, etc., I had in my spirit I wanted to step up to the plate and do something, and God allowed me to be the president," he said.

Leak, now 26, said the neighborhood has vastly improved. He said with the



Photo by Todd Luck

The Easton Neighborhood got its own historic marker on Saturday, Sept. 26

help of Taylor and the City Council, the association was able to demolish 15 boarded-up properties. Easton has gotten welcome signs with flowerbeds at neighborhood entrances, new playground equipment and resurfaced basketball courts since then. Three years ago, the association, in cooperation with the Winston-Salem Police Department, formed a neighborhood crime watch, which Leak said has caused crime to greatly decrease.

Leak, who works as a small grants coordinator for Neighbors for Better Neighborhoods, said NBN helped train him to be a community leader from a young age. He said the Easton Association has gotten more than \$3,500 in grants in the last seven years through NBN for beautifying the neighborhood, training residents and community days.

Leak said the neighborhood continues to change as more renters are now living there and the associ-

ation works to build bridges with the community's growing Hispanic population. Leak said his grandfather would be happy to see the historic marker and the Easton that it now sits in.

"I think he'd be very proud," he said. "It was a longtime coming."

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Bonus Funds for Housing Projects for the Homeless

A public meeting to discuss potential bonus funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for supportive housing for homeless households will be held by the City of Winston-Salem as follows:

Date: Tuesday, October 6, 2015
Time: 12:00 noon – 1:00 p.m.
Place: Room 201, City Hall, 101 N. Main Street, Winston-Salem

Information on the potential funding opportunity will be posted to the City web site. For more information, please contact Ms. Mellin Parker at (336) 734-1310 or mellinp@cityofws.org.

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