

Eno River Festival 2001 Review



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Festival Highlights

Expanded children's activities, a theatrical debut, and a reunion of old friends were just some of the highlights of the 22nd annual Festival for the Eno. The Festival, held each Independence Day Weekend at West Point on the Eno, concluded with a record crowd on the Fourth of July.

More than 37,000 people attended the Festival over its three day run. As usual, Festival-goers were treated to a delightful smorgasbord of the best crafts, food, and performers that North Carolina has to offer. Despite the inconvenience of a two day break mid-Festival, most all of last year's artisans were back to enjoy the music, camaraderie and spirit of the Eno. Their booths lined the paths, offering everything from homemade jams to sculpture, furniture and clothing. The sunlight filtered through diaphanous fabrics and stained glass, bounced off jewels and precious metals, and reflected through air heavy with the aromas of funnel cakes and curries.

In the Children's area, new additions and returning favorites offered education, entertainment and activities to kids of all ages. Of particular pride to the Festival was the new Creekside Environmental Education area, organized by the Eno River Association's Environmental Education Sub-Committee. Located just across the road from the Otter Stage, the Creekside programs provided fun, interactive activities which highlighted the biology and geography of the Eno River ecosystem. New Hope Elementary teacher John Waszak and his 5th grade students exhibited and explained their collection of amphibians indigenous to the Eno. The Haw River Assembly lent their Stream Habitat table, which highlighted the invertebrates one might encounter while participating in

the E.R.A.'s soon-to-be-launched "River Watch" project. The impact of pesticides and run-off were explained in Schoolhouse of Wonders Watershed Model. Volunteers Sue Monahan, Mary Ellen Ackerman, Larry Bohs and Holly Reid constructed a gigantic hands-on mural which encouraged kids to identify different animals that live in and around the Eno.

At the Otter Stage, Jim Alberti's Flea Circus was back after missing last year's event. Alberti, who comes from a long line of flea impresarios, operates the only remaining flea circus in North America and performed three shows daily to delighted crowds. Solar Village Institute again provided clean solar energy in the children's area, generating more than enough power to supply the stage and the flea circus.

The Spoken Word Stage hosted its annual assemblage of North Carolina's finest writers and storytellers including: Nasdijj, Katy Munger, Barry Saunders, Pamela Duncan and Joe Miller. A first was achieved as a new stage work, *Wisteria*, by acclaimed playwright John Justice, debuted at this year's Festival. With a musical score by Jon Shain, and a full cast featuring Clyde Edgerton and Taz Halloween, *Wisteria* drew a large and enthusiastic crowd.

On the music stages: long time Festival favorites such as the Badgett Sisters and John Dee Holeman were back again, twenty-two years after their first Festival for the Eno performances. First time Festival performers also drew rave reviews. Large crowds greeted the performances of the legendary Amazing Rhythm Aces, banjo virtuoso Tony Trishka, and returning native Johnny Irion with Sarah Lee Guthrie. They were joined on-stage by the Carabines. The performances of Saffire- the Uppity Blues Women and the young cajun band Balfa Tourjours, brought the dancers to their feet. Returning

artist Christine Kane showed why she is rapidly gaining mainstream popularity with a great performance that drew a very large crowd to the Meadow.

By far though, the most anticipated act was the Wednesday performance of Mike Craver, Bill Hicks and Jim Watson. As long time Triangle residents well know, Mike, Bill and Jim were early members of the highly lauded Red Clay Ramblers and performed at many of our early Festivals. Over the years, the three individually departed the band to pursue their own projects. Their "reunion" on the Grove Stage at this year's Festival was their first public performance together in fifteen years.

The threat of afternoon showers did not deter the throngs from arriving early to stake out a good spot for the day's entertainment. Space for seating was at a premium throughout the morning and by the time Robin and Linda Williams began at noon, there was hardly a patch of ground available.

Craver, Watson and Hicks did not disappoint. They delivered a rousing and sweet performance, featuring many of their most familiar tunes including "Fourth of July at the County Fair", and "Hobo's Last Letter". The passing of time had not diminished their collective abilities and their performance was tight, their harmonies dead-on, and they seemed to be having a mighty fine time. The set ended with a sing-along as Robin and Linda Williams and Libby Hicks joined the guys and the crowd sang as well, swaying as much as the limited space would allow.

The kind support of the News and Observer and Wellspring Grocery helped ensure ample publicity for the Festival. This helped both attendance and volunteer recruitment. Thanks to the dedication and energy of the Festival's incredible volunteers, the event ran smoothly at all times. The stadium park-

ing lots filled early on Wednesday, but the volunteers did an excellent job of diverting cars to the reserve lots. The trash and recycling crews ensured that not only did we continue to divert 85% of our waste from the landfill, but the park was clean and neat by Thursday morning. T.R.O.S.A. (Triangle Residency Options for Substance Abusers) continues to provide labor for the moving and building of stages. Thanks to their generous help, the stages were disassembled and stacked within a week of the Festival's close. T.R.O.S.A. is involved in the Festival in other areas as well. This year they served chicken dinners in the food court, staffed a non-profit booth, and performed on the Meadow Stage.

The success of this year's Festival is a testament to the talent and abilities of the E.R.A.'s membership, and of our support within the community. Everyone associated with this great event should be proud of our accomplishments, and content in a job well done. We are already looking forward to next year's Festival, which will be held July 4th, 6th and 7th. We hope to see you then.

-Greg Bell, ERA



Photo by Boykin Bell

Thank You

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