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**It Happened Last Night**

**Siren '07: Saving the Free**

By Gavin Paul Giovagnoli on July 23, 2007 2:00 AM [Comment](#)



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Word on New York's Coney Island boardwalk this year was that the world famous hot dog staple would be torn down and shadowed by condos. Though it's a half-truth -- see the evil Thor Equities and their renovation plans -- *The Village Voice's* 7th annual music festival was, once again, all sunshine and free rock on Saturday (July 21).

Save for Sri Lankan-bred hip-hop political firecracker, M.I.A., and her Missy Elliott-like thumps and whoops, the bill was literally a rock affair, with the timeless original punks New York Dolls at the top of the pile. Lead singer David Johansen and guitarist Sylvain ate up their prime time slot on the main stage, launching backward summersault guitar solos and speaker stack jumps during classics like "Personality Crisis" and "Looking for a Kiss," and a cover from their "favorite group," Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart."

Meanwhile, bleeding-heart hipsters flocked to the second stage to catch other headlining act, Cursive. With their horn-heavy rock of the cathartic kind, mass screams by the audience and singer Tim Kasher alike redefined the meaning of 'Siren,' something of which ex-Pumpkin James Iha decided to show up for, being all emo in the press pit. In between tracks, Kasher took time to reiterate what a drag it would be if Coney Island gets gentrified, supporting the words with their satirical stab at the American Dream, "Dorothy at Forty."

But the pre-sunset rockness is what made Siren 2007 really memorable, especially before the VIP section was over max capacity and we could actually acquire a beer without throwing elbows. Highlights included hometown Brooklyn sweethearts Matt and Kim just beaming ear-to-ear smiles over crowd-surfers and heaving chests, their Quasi-like energy so infectious, fans lunged themselves onstage to catch a hug.

Philly psych rockers Dr. Dog, who saw the hottest part of the day, cursed the fest for making everyone sweat, but proceeded to hop around in fedoras and no shoes, ditching their Beach Boy doo-wop for mid-'60's Pavement era cuts like on their cover of Architecture in Helsinki's "Heart It Races."

And then there were the Detroit Cobras, who seemed to have transported themselves directly from the Motor City's dingiest dive bar, choppin' up speed blues covers that felt odd without a barstool to kick over to a bottle to smash. Chain-smoking frontwoman Rachel Nagy pointed out between drags that they "have Coney Islands in Detroit, but they're hot dogs...with chili," and that we didn't "look like a hot dog with chili." To continue with their infatuation with hot dogs, they went straight into one of their only original cuts, "Hot Dog (Watch Me Eat)."

Both the White Rabbits and We Are Scientists deserve honorable mentions for playing the power-indie card to a sea of early-day passer-bys and doubling their audience by way of pure knee-buckling power chords and harmonies, rather than stage antics.

But otherwise, Siren '07, though kind of a homogeneous bill this year, rallied another diverse set of New Yorkers for one of the only free festivals in the country. Here's to battling Thor and keeping the carnival freak show fun alive.

**We asked:** So 'siren' is the new cowbell. What song would you put it in and why?



Topics: Gavin Paul Giovagnoli, It Happened Last Night

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