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Lollapalooza Day 3: Foo Fighters Play to Mud People; Best Coast, The Cars and Dale Earnhardt Jr. Jr. Evade the Rain
 By Gavin Paul on August 9, 2011 in Live Reviews, Music, Music Festivals



Dripping from the torrential rain that plagued Sunday in Chicago, a white-eyed Dave Grohl confided to a sea of mud people. "You know what I like? A rock and roll band that actually gets up on stage and plays their fucking instruments," before cueing a machine-gun "Monkey Wrench" march from Taylor Hawkins and throating that line about innocence, permanently etched into our early 90s conscious. There were more than a few apes more interested in flinging mud and beer at each other, but by and large, this was a rally point in an ongoing conversation about rock as the great communicator. From a dude, an industry, a band and a festival that has seen better days.



The Foo Fighters went on to prove, with a stiff middle-finger to the skies, that honest hard-working rock bands can still rule the world, Grohl, full of anecdotes, like a Naked Raygun show in Chicago that planted the seed for the dream in 1982.



Or back in '91 when he and Cobain went to the first Lollapalooza during the recording of *Nevermind* in LA – "There were 20,000 people there to see bands that were actually cool," he laughed off, made Perry Farrell come and hug him on stage for a thanks, and end-capped the evening with, "Everlong," thousands of wrist-banded fists in the air screaming, "If everything could ever feel this real forever."



Not to take away from the headliner's cred, but something was in the air that day. The rain, yes. But also a handful of bands chasing different levels of rockness in fierce fashion. Even out of the gate with *Crazy Heart* soundtrack country soul, Ryan Bingham. Backed by a trio of booted twang stalwarts, the Dead Horses, Bingham wasn't out to change the face of Texas rock, but wore his heartache on his sleeve, coming off as the most genuine whiskey-and-smoke tale in the park, clicking back both heels during a cut from third effort, "Junky Star" called "Depression," explaining eyes half-open that all he's got is love, and it's just damn depressing in a young Tom Waits kind of way.



Whereas Cali-surf poplette Best Coast were all sass and snarl when the first wave of rain attacked, giving the audience the bird, a dry-staged Bethany Cosentino shouting at the audience, "Fuck you, it's raining," po-going into shoulder-stummer "Crazy for you" with a smirk. Fans took it with bigger smiles, opener their mouths and arms and spitting what they caught on each other.



The Cars were to the untrained eye, pretty placid, but Ric Ocasek paid a gleaming homage to Ben Orr's "Moving in Stereo" behind a set of horn-rimmed glasses that didn't need a topless Phoebe Cates to be cool, high notes included, while Greg Hawkes fingered his way around the keys like it was the dawning age of the synth. The red shades helped him get there.



Otherwise, the cool award goes to Dale Earnhardt Jr. Jr., a.) for evading the rain, b.) for secretly placing bottles of Dom Perignon in a few select porta-potties – or so they said – c.) for their bubble machine d.) for calling themselves Dale Earnhardt Jr. Jr. and e.) for the handclap whistle-along to "Vocal Chords" Daniel Zott soul-glowing "life's so short to play it safe" while bubbles popped in his eyes.



Portugal. The Man came a close second, morphing into Bowie-at-his-peak stride with a set heavily pulled from their latest, *The Man In The Mountain Cloud*.



When they deviated, they did so in golden R&B fashion, as with the erie timing of "The Sun" from *Satanist*, the four-piece harmonizing to John Gourley's rattled acoustic strum, "waiting for the band to come." Later, some assholes would steal their van full of gear.



While on the other side of the field, as the eye of the doom clouds lurched through, Austin's coddled post-rock set, Explosions in The Sky promised "an hour's worth of rock in 45 minutes," so said bassist Munaf Rayani, refusing requests from fans against the barricade to put on some face-paint in war-rock spirit,



instead lofting *Take Care, Take Care, Take Care's* opener, "Last Known Surroundings" into the clouds, drawing light together like a tribe on stage and hobbling in tandem to its goblin drum-line at the end, an endless shimmering cascade of reverbed guitars flowing from one another. One puddle stomper's reflection – "This. Is. Epic!" There's always the hope. –Words and photos by Gavin Paul



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