

Live Music and Family Fun in the Sun: RI Blues Fest and Nashville RI Country Music Fest come back swinging

“Summer can be brief and fleeting in New England, so we’re always trying to find new ways to make the most of it,” says **Michael Freidman**, owner of Mulligan’s Island and host of two of RI’s up and coming music festivals - RI Blues Fest and Nashville RI Country Music Fest. If you’re looking to have some summer fun with live music outdoors, both these festivals have something special to offer.

RI Blues Fest will be on Saturday, July 16 and Nashville RI Country Music Fest on Sunday, July 17, both running from noon to 9 pm and hosted at Mulligan’s Island in Cranston. Featuring line-ups that mix of local musicians and national ones, the festivals have something for everyone.

As a large outdoor venue, Mulligan’s Island also has room for families to bring games, lawn chairs, tents and all the essentials.

“People who come, they’ll bring chairs, they’ll bring blankets, they’ll bring umbrellas - sunbrellas,” says Freidman. “This year we’re actually going to be putting up additional tents to provide more shady space to families that maybe want to get out of the sun more, or adults who just love being outside but maybe don’t want as much direct sun.”

All other Mulligan’s Island activities will also be open during this time, including a mini-golf course, driving range, batting cages and more, giving attendees the option to switch things up for a bit during the festival if they so desire to.

“This year we’ll have more activities for the kids like inflatables and other things,” Friedman adds, noting that while the majority of their attendees are typically a bit older, they want the event to appeal to young families so that they can bring their kids as well.

Food and drink will be served, including craft beer, barbeque and several other food options. Something that distinguishes the music festivals at Mulligan’s Island from others is that participants are allowed to leave and return throughout the day, so if an attendee wants to dine elsewhere or just wants to get out of the sun for a little while, they have the option to do that and return later.

This year, Mulligan’s Island has also teamed up with the Park Theater so that the festivals will have an indoor alternative should there be inclement weather.

Since their inceptions, the two music festivals have attracted attendees not just from RI, but from out-of-state as well.

The RI Blues Fest began in 2018, when Freidman noted that though RI has many music festivals, there was a gap in the representation of some genres.

“Blues music was not well represented in the spectrum of shows that were being promoted,” explains Freidman. “We went out and we found that we could attract really good talent both locally and

nationally ... and we just sort of rolled it out there.”

Noting the growth of popularity for country music in the state, it occurred to Friedman that Blues might not be the only genre of music that would benefit from a festival. Thus, in 2019, Mulligan’s Island hosted its first Country Music Fest. “We evaluated [that growth in popularity] as another opportunity to reach out to our audience and find talent that would perform and would appeal to those people who were coming out to Mulligan’s already. It’s been good and it’s been growing.”

This year, the musician line-up for Blues Fest will include Neal & The Vipers, Vintage R&B All-Stars with special guest Sugar Ray, Robin Kapsalis & Vintage #18, and Victor Wainwright & The Train. For Nashville RI Country Music Fest, performing musicians include Lauren King, Country Wild Heart, Annie Brobst, Houston Bernard, and Tyler James & The Silks.

“Overall we’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from both performers and the crowds,” Freidman reflects. “We’re always sort of tinkering with it, trying to learn what would be better going forward.”

Because the festivals are outdoors, there are no COVID-19 restrictions in place for these events. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit mulligansisland.com.