

Roots Report: Don't Let These Shows Pass You By

Okee dokee folks ... As I mentioned last month the summer shows are plenty. I have managed to get to quite a few so far and have many more to attend. One commonality I have noticed among the performers is that a lot of these folks are getting old, some very old. I guess I am, too. With age comes wisdom ... or just the AARP?

Shawn Colvin was the first of the bunch of concerts I went to last month. Colvin played the Narrows in Fall River, and she made several jokes alluding to her age. She is just 58 years old. In spite of her mocking her own diminished capacities of memory and eyesight, she put on a great show. Nimfest in Newport presented Susan Cowsill. She is the youngest member of the Cowsills and checks in at age 54, just a year older than I am. She still has the youthful look she had as a child. Her voice and performance are still top notch and I didn't hear her make any age-related jokes, though her audience was a bit up there in years. The former Newport resident drew a nice-sized crowd to King's Park. Unfortunately, Cowsill seemed to rely more on random cover songs than her own or even Cowsills material. Next up was Yes at the Newport Concert Series. This bunch just looks ancient. Despite the fact that I thought they might break a hip or need CPR on stage, they too put on an amazing show and pulled off great live versions of the *Fragile* and *Close To The Edge* albums in their entirety. They can still play as well as they did the last time I saw them 30 odd years ago. The lead singer who replaced Jon Anderson seemed young enough to be a son or even grandson of the band members, though he behaved and looked very Jesus-like and appeared to be singing to his father above. The topper of the senior citizen summer tour had to have been the Crosby, Stills and Nash show at PPAC. What was supposed to be a CSN show was more of a Crosby-Nash show. Stephen Stills' voice, for lack of a better word, is toast and he was off stage quite a bit. He could barely talk, let alone sing. I actually felt bad for him. However, his guitar playing is still strong. CSN as a group, whose ages are 69 to 72, are pretty tired, though Nash is still a pretty strong performer at 72. They did make age-related jokes; Crosby made one in reference to putting out a new album instead of rolling over and dying at their age. Funny, but not really. For some, the nostalgia factor of seeing these legends live skews their audio palates. While CSN was an enjoyable show, it is tough to see legends who are burning out with age. I guess maybe it is better to burn out than fade away. I would much rather watch these bands than most of the auto-tuned/computer sampled products of music of today. These folks are/were the real deal. There are still plenty of great performances (young and old) to catch during the remaining days of summer. Read on...

Singer-Songwriter Jackson Browne will visit the Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC) on Wednesday, August 20. Playing solo guitar and piano, Jackson will perform songs from his entire body of work. Jackson Browne has written and performed some of the most literate and moving songs in popular music and has defined a genre of songwriting charged with honesty, emotion and personal politics. The 65-year-old Browne is best known for songs such as "Doctor My Eyes," "Here Come Those Tears Again," "Rock Me On the Water," "The Pretender," "Running on Empty," "The Pretender" and "Fountain of Sorrow." He was honored with induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004, and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2007. Beyond his music, he is known for his advocacy on behalf of the environment, human rights and arts education. He's a co-founder of the groups Musicians United for Safe Energy (MUSE) and Nukefree.org. For more about this show, "Take It Easy" over to PPACRI.org

If you don't know who Kala Farnham is by now, you should. She is a pint-sized, piano-playing powerhouse from Putnam, Conn. Kala is quickly becoming a mainstay in the RI and surrounding area's music scene. I first saw Kala perform as part of the Sweet Little Variety Show at the Roots in PVD about two years ago. I was amazed at the talent of the young girl who played a keyboard that was bigger than her. From where I sat she appeared to be no more than high school age but I was shocked when she said she had been playing piano for more than 20 years. Kala started lessons at age 3 and now at the ripe old age of 26 has been playing piano almost as long as she has been walking and talking. She just released her first studio CD, *Anahata: Wake Up Your Heart*. Farnham's three previous releases were more homemade products. Though I am not fond of reviewing CDs, I am making a bit of an exception for this one. I love this CD and wanted you all to know about it! The disc starts out with a simple tinkling of a couple of notes on the keys, but quickly launches into the big, fully produced sound of "Naked Honest". The 13 song recording features 12 original songs by Farnham and one cover. Kala handles all keys and vocals; Daisy Castro adds nice touches with violin, and master guitarist Duke Levine provides tasty licks throughout. From the aforementioned lead track "Naked Honest" to the final cut, "Maitri," the CD delivers wonderful songs that are strong both lyrically and musically. Favorites of mine are: "Songbird," "Pencil & Ink," "Ruthless" and "Maitri." She is a classically trained musician with influences of pop, Broadway and world music in her sound. For ease of description, Farnham's style can be compared to other female singer-songwriters such as Kate Bush, Tori Amos, Vanessa Carlton, Fiona Apple and Norah Jones, but she definitely has a style of her own. Those who are fortunate to see Kala live are wowed in the same way that I was. If you are interested in catching one of her shows this month, she will be splitting the night with Adam Trudel at Stage Right Studio, 68 South Main Street in Woonsocket (stagerightstudio.org) on Friday, August 29. For more, tickle your ivories to kalafarnham.com

Many of you may remember the work of the late singer-songwriter Harry Chapin. "Taxi," "Cats in the Cradle" and "W.O.L.D." are just some of the fine songs that he left us with. He also left a daughter, Jen, as part of his legacy. Jen Chapin is a remarkable singer-songwriter in her own right. She writes and performs her own music but it has the soul of her father's work. She has been compared at times with Laura Nyro, Tori Amos and Alanis Morissette. Jen has been featured on "Late Nite with Conan O'Brien," NPR's Mountain Stage and WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour, and Sirius Satellite's The Loft. She has performed on stage with Bruce Springsteen, and has opened for Bruce Hornsby, Smokey Robinson and the Neville Brothers. When Chapin tours, she plays with her husband, bassist Stephen Crump, as well as guitarist Jamie Fox, a group billed as the "Jen Chapin Trio" that is described as playing urban folk music. She is out on the road this summer and will be making a stop at Sandywoods Center for the Arts in Tiverton on Friday, August 22. She released her 7th album, *Reckoning*, last year and when I saw her this past November in Hingham her show consisted mainly of material from this disc. *Reckoning* was produced by 5-time Grammy award winner Kevin Killen and its songs are "songs of ambition (and the lack thereof), of anger, and gratitude, of privilege, and being without, of being overwhelmed but still hungry for more life. In short, of family." Harry Chapin was instrumental in starting the organizations the Presidential Commission on World Hunger and World Hunger Year, and worked tirelessly for them. Jen Chapin carries on his work and is on the board of WHYHunger, the organization founded by her father. The show at Sandywoods will keep this up. They will be collecting canned goods for the local food shelter and donations for WHYHunger. For more, taxi over to jenchapin.com or sandywoodsmusic.com

There is a LOT of music this summer in the City by the Sea. The Newport Concert Series keeps it going under the big white tent on America's Cup. Rounding out the summer dates are August 10 with Gregg Allman (66 years old), Dean DePalma will be on the Point Stage; on August 16 is The Beach Boys (in

their 70s) with Joe Silva on the Point Stage; on August 20 will be Alanis Morissette and on August 31 is Kenny Wayne Shepard. For more, navigate to newportwaterfrontevents.com. On August 29 you can Rock the Fort and get hoochie-kooed with Rick Derringer (he is 66, just to keep the age thing going). The first classic rock concert at Fort Adams will also include Steely Dan tribute — Hey Nineteen and Rhett Tyler and Early Warning — a Stevie Ray Vaughan inspired group. For more about the show, sloop over to: newportrocksthefort.com. You still have a few Sundays left for Nimfest's free shows at King's Park on Wellington Avenue. They happen from 3-6pm. For more about those shows, float over to: facebook.com/nimfest. The Touro Synagogue will present a Klezmer concert featuring the Yiddishkeit Klezmer Ensemble on Sunday, August 10 at 4:30pm in Patriots Park on Touro Street. The concert, presented in cooperation with Common Fence Music, is being given by Touro Synagogue in celebration of Newport's 375th anniversary. Klezmer music, for those of you who don't know, originated in the villages and ghettos of Eastern Europe where itinerant Jewish troubadours traveled from town to town and performed at joyful events, particularly weddings. With its lively beat and distinctive sound, Klezmer music, which is similar to a big band sound or jazz, has enjoyed a renaissance and renewed popularity on the concert stage and as dance music. It is free and open to the public. In case of inclement weather, the concert will take place nearby in the Colony House in Washington Square. For more, dreidel your way to commonfencemusic.org

This year, Nashville-flavored Americana, Canadian music and hot Louisiana dance bands each get a stage at The 17th Annual Rhythm and Roots Festival on opening night. This is the BEST festival and party of the entire year. No singular location outside of New Orleans or Chicago can be said to celebrate traditional music perhaps more than southern Rhode Island. Charlestown hosts the well-known summer music festival that features North-American born musical traditions that include bluegrass, folk, jazz, blues, Cajun, zydeco, R&B, country and rock & roll. The annual festival attracts over 10,000 festival-goers from about half the US and several countries to Rhode Island over Labor Day Weekend. Nationally recognized producer of the Rhythm and Roots Festival, Chuck Wentworth, describes the essence of roots music. "You know it when people play from the heart. When people are there for the joy of making music, not to make money or achieve fame... it's non-cognitive." This year Wentworth has booked several tradition-bending (and blending) performers never before heard in New England, and plans to introduce his loyal audience to exceptional Canadian artists in a special opening night tribute. On Friday, August 29, the live performances kick off at 4pm with three stages of music in three diverse themes. The Canadian Stage will feature a special tribute to outstanding north-of-the-border performers, and is hosted by Leonard Podolak of The Dukks (Podolak's band is the host band of this year's festival). Other celebrated Canadian artists to take the stage include blues sensation Matt Andersen, and the folksy, award-winning Ten Strings and a Goat Skin. Rhode Island native, and now Nashville mainstay Sarah Potenza, hosts the Americana Stage, with a night of music that features traditional bluegrass artists the Travelin' McCourys and Grand Ole Opry outlaw (and "It Takes Balls to be a Woman" songwriter) Elizabeth Cook. This is the hottest festival of music and dance in New England. The Rhythm and Roots Festival serves as the grand finale to a Rhode Island summer. This two-and-a-half day, five-stage, all-ages festival takes place August 29, 30 and 31 at Ninigret Park in Charlestown. There is SO MUCH MORE to this festival but I am out of room! Find out more by two-steppin' over to rhythmandroots.com.

Though this is happening at the beginning of September, I figured I would give you a head start for your musical planning. The first annual Providence Folk Festival will take place on Sunday, September 7 at Roger Williams National Memorial in Downtown Providence. The fledgling festival will feature two stages of acoustic-themed music. Headlining artists are Robin Lane (of Robin Lane and the Chartbusters) who is known for her hits: "When Things Go Wrong" and "Why Do You Tell Lies" as well

as her backing vocals on Neil Young's first album. Legend of the 1970s Andy Pratt, best known for his hits, "Avenging Annie" and "Summer, Summer" will also be gracing the festival stage. Also on the main stage, The Rank Strangers will bring bluegrass, Ed McGuirl and Joe Lambiase bring the blues, Lisa Martin a bit o' country/folk, Dan Lilley (with Amy Bedard and Scatman) strums out the Americana sound, Allysén Callery and Bob Kendall will perform both together and solo, and Steve Allain will provide his entertaining MC and singer-songwriter talents. The Rhode Island Songwriters Association sponsors the second stage and will present solo artists such as Kala Farnham, Jake Haller, Tracie Potochnik, WS Monroe and many others. The festival is free and is a great opportunity to get a good dose of the RI sound as well as some classic performances. If you are interested in supporting the festival financially you still have time and can help out by going to the Indiegogo fund raising site: www.indiegogo.com/projects/the-providence-folk-festival-2. For more about the festival, cock-a-doodle-doo to HearInRhodeIsland.com

That's it for now. Thanks for reading!

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