

THE ULTIMATE ESTROGENARIUM

Portlanders sojourn to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival

by Jaymee R. Cuti

A sizable pilgrimage is headed to the 30th annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival from Portland to partake in a week of music, debauchery, politically charged interchange and community building with women, for women, by women.

For those new to the event, several festival workers from Portland are holding a get-together to dispel rumors and offer helpful tips.

"The event will be a chance to get a visceral sense of the festival, to ask questions about what it's like," said Holly Pruett, a Mich Fest worker for the eighth year.

According to Pruett, 22 Oregonians are on this year's work crew, and through the years, 450 women from Oregon have worked at the festival.

"Add to that the craftswomen, artists and festi-goers from Oregon, and you have a sizable annual pilgrimage," Pruett said.

The meeting will start 6 p.m. May 22 at Cotton Cloud Futons, 701 N.E. Broadway. It will include food, dancing and viewings of the short films *Radical Harmonies* and *Michigan Fever*.

Festival, as it's called by festies (those who attend) takes place on "the land," a secluded wood in Michigan where thousands gather annually. This year's festival is from Aug. 9 through 14. Regulars say the experience is nothing short of amazing, commonly referencing feelings of safety and community.

"It's the only place I have ever been that I could walk at night alone, completely naked, and be completely safe," said Sossity Chiricuzio, who has traveled from Tucson, Ariz., and Portland to attend Mich Fest.

Others say they look forward to the festival all year to decompress.

"I go there every year to cleanse my soul," said Charly Welch, 21, who has attended 18 festivals.

The festival sometimes has the reputation as a staid event for radical lesbians, although efforts are being made to prevent stagnation in culture and programming. Founded by lesbian separatists involved in the women's music movement, things have changed a lot in 30 years.

"The music has gotten so much better over the last couple of years as they try to incorporate stuff that appeals to the younger generation," noted Welch.

Aside from the more than 40 music events and a large vendor area, attendees say many issues on the progressive radar spawned from discussions and workshops at the festival.

"So many of the commitments in feminist enterprises in the last 30 years have some roots in workshops in Michigan," said Pruett.

Despite its promotion of openness, the festival is not without exclusion. The stated policy is that Mich Fest is only open to people born women, excluding transgender folks.

"The festival has always been intended as a place that women could experience life that is

designed and supported by other women for just one week a year, as an alternative to routine patriarchal culture," said Pruett. "From my own perspective, I forget that it's women only because there's such a diversity of gender representation, from butch dykes to bearded women to bois," said Pruett.

According to Pruett, when one's gender is in question, festival officials will state the policy and ask the individual to respect it. No further questioning takes place.

Chiricuzio says she is glad there is no panty check and concurs that a spectrum of genders is represented at the festival.



So much to do, and music, too. Mich Fest revelers catch a show.

"If you know you're a woman and you live as a woman and you think as a woman and you engage with other women as a woman and if you have a penis, you keep it to yourself and know that it triggers safety issues in some women, then I don't have a problem sharing space with you," said Chiricuzio.

In protest of the official policy, Camp Trans meets on the same week, across the road from the festival.

"Mich Fest bills itself as being a festival of diversity. I think it's silly to embrace diversity without embracing all diversity," said Lauren Steely, a self-identified trans dyke who serves as strategy coordinator for Camp Trans.

According to Steely, while Camp Trans was created as a protest, it has afforded the trans community the opportunity to socialize and organize.

"Besides being a protest this year, we're working on making it a boot camp for trans organizers, so folks can go back to their own communities and organize around issues of importance to the trans population," she said. "The reason we focus on Michigan is it is the single biggest example of blatant discrimination in the queer women's community."

Camp Trans has found many supporters within Mich Fest attendees. According to Welch, the policy frustrates many women who are open to having all self-identified women at the festival.

"There have been women who have been going to festival all 30 years, and the whole trans movement is very new to them. You have to educate people before you can get them to change," said Welch. □



SUBARU.

1.9% APR* ON ALL NEW 2005 SUBARUS

HUNDREDS of subarus to choose from

2005 SUBARU OUTBACK



2005 SUBARU FORESTER



HAVE A JOB? WENTWORTH WANTS TO FINANCE YOU!



2005 SUBARU OUTBACK
All Wheel Drive - Fully Loaded

1 AT \$20,995
#9544 preowned



2004 SUBARU OUTBACK
All Wheel Drive - All Power - Low Miles

1 AT \$18,995
preowned #9451

Toll free (866)508-2389

WENTWORTHSUBARU.COM

WENTWORTH

East End of the Burnside Bridge
107 SE Grand Ave

SUBARU
DRIVEN BY WHAT'S INSIDE™

* On approved credit. Subject to prior sale
Pictures for illustration purposes only
Expires 5/19/05