

It's On!

Introducing the First Annual Portland Queer Music Festival

BY RYAN J. PRADO

A fixture on Portland's music scene, Samuel Thomas may have been destined to spearhead the First Annual Portland Queer Music Festival. While juggling gigs as director and founder of the Portland FREE Music Project, organizing the Maricon dance night at The Matador and judging this year's Portland Idol, Thomas somehow still found time to break more ground for Portland queer culture.

On Saturday, July 30, Red Cap Garage and Boxxes play host to the city's first festival dedicated to queer music. The all-day, all-genre—sadly not all-ages—event spotlights primarily up-and-coming acts from the Portland metro area, placing them on two stages

you guys have a festival, we wanna do it.”

For its inaugural run, Thomas approached the idea from a prophetic point of view, dubbing PQMF the “first annual,” knowing it would be a success. While that remains to be seen, the event has thus far garnered some 300 promised attendees on its Facebook page, with about the same amount of those saying “maybe” they’d attend. What should be noted, also, within the queer festival canon is the emergence of the Not Enough! Queer Music and Arts Festival, which pits performance art, film, music, visual and all manner of artistic undertakings September 18-19 in North Portland. As that festival generates more steam on a

DIY, subculture level, Thomas’ sights are set in a more mainstream, marketable milieu, with the focus just on music. He estimates the day’s total attendance at between 800 and 1,000 festival goers.

“In terms of the amount of bands and performers we have, we will be the largest in the Northwest,” says Thomas, who’s booked all 30 bands himself. The 30th act to round out the lineup will be filled by the winner of Red

Cap’s Portland Idol. “If everybody shows up, and we have a really good turnout,” Thomas says, “we could easily be the largest queer music festival on the West Coast.”

That confidence isn’t surprising given the talent assembled for PQMF’s first installment. Representing PDX is a spectrum-ranging sample of everything from drag queen electro (CJ and the Dolls) and piano balladeers (Zach Zaitlin) to burgeoning rappers (Jeu Breedlove, SistaFist) and beloved deejays (Moisti, Lunch Lady). Similarly engaging acts from Seattle include the indie-dance

confessionals of Noddy, the pop of Secret Shoppers and more. Despite the meshing of singer-songwriters with rappers, backpack electro kids with sexy industrial rock, et cetera, the performers are relishing the opportunity to do it all under the “Queer Music Festival” banner.

“Most queer art or music events focus on one genre of performance like drag or deejaying or rock,” Zaitlin explains. “It’s rare to see an event where queer artists working in a variety of styles are all together under one roof.”

It seems a unanimous sentiment that an event like the PQMF will almost certainly unify and empower the queer arts community, especially what with prevailing stigmas of queer music and homophobia still rampant in music industry circles.

“Being queer and in a band is a hard place to be,” explains Reese Umbaugh of Noddy. “Mainstream gay culture doesn’t really embrace independent music and the usual genres involved. Local music indie scenes are still primarily white, straight and male, and I am still surprised at the amount of homophobic, sexist and racist attitudes I have witnessed over the years playing in bands in the local music scene.”

Portland rhyme-stylers SistaFist agree, and see a huge opportunity in the event.

“We deserve a safe space to create and share our work,” says EmSnatch. “With a queer festival there will be zero tolerance for homophobia, which is unfortunately not the case at many other festivals.”

As the PQMF nears, the final touches are being put on the production—largely by Thomas alone, but also with help from sponsors Absolut Vodka, Pants-Off Productions,



Noddy

Morel Ink, QPDX.com and Sherman Clay/Moe’s Pianos of Portland. But even with that kind of muscle, the infancy of the festival coupled with Thomas’ ambition are making lessons in event undertaking easy to come by.

“When I was planning it, I was like, ‘Oh, 30 bands isn’t that much,’” Thomas jokes. “And now I’m like, ‘Whoa, 30 bands!’ I’ve got to be the point person for everyone who comes in all day. And they all have a lot of questions. It’s almost like a full-time job right now, just doing this, as opposed to all my other jobs I’m supposed to be doing.”

What lies ahead following the first annual fest is anyone’s guess. Thomas is already thinking big—bigger acts, more bands. In fact, he’s already working on the Second Annual Portland Queer Music Festival.

“I’m already planning next year’s. I’ve got some of the basics down, I’m in contact with certain people,” Thomas promises. “It’ll happen.”

The First Annual Portland Queer Music Festival takes place Saturday, July 30 from 3 p.m. to 2 a.m. at Red Cap Garage and Boxxes (1035 SW Stark St.). Admission is \$3. The event is 21 and over. For a full list of performers and updates, search “Portland Queer Music Festival” on Facebook.



Zach Zaitlin

HANS PAUL HALLGREN

for the duration of the day between the two bars. Bands from as far away as Philadelphia (Slutever) and St. Louis (Julie Schurr) have also been confirmed, as have a few acts from Seattle. Thomas sees the influx of out-of-towners as inherent to the spirit of a queer music festival.

“We discovered there’s a huge interest and a need for music from outside Portland,” explains Thomas, who’d originally planned the event to be Portland only. “There are a bazillion music festivals, but not many queer music festivals. So we had people begging, like, ‘Hey,

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