

'Up Close and Personal'

It was a beautiful weekend for a Bluegrass festival in Osceola, Indiana. Though it was August, the mid-day temperatures were relatively pleasant with highs which topped out in the low 80's. The clouds scattered in the blue skies allowed the sun to play hide-and-seek with them frequently enough to keep the performers on-stage relatively comfortable all day long.

Calabogie Road was one of the bands invited to participate in this summer festival. We performed two shows that Saturday, and were the first act of the day. At about 10:00, the morning air was still cool and pleasant. The easterly-facing stage had us all wearing our sunglasses while performing (shades of ZZ Top), but overall we couldn't have asked for better weather for Bluegrass.

The line-up at this festival was impressive. We shared the stage with a number of very talented and popular local and/or regional bands, as well as prominent national performers like Larry Sparks and The Special Consensus.

As is common with many festivals, there were a number of canopies set up for the bands to hang out at to and display and sell items like CD's, shirts, hats, bumper stickers, magnets and the like. Strictly by chance, Special Consensus set up under the canopy next to ours, and members of both bands – as well as the festival-goers – were checking out the variety of items for sale. We all enjoyed a lot of 'shake and howdy' moments.

One thing you'll find among bluegrass performers – even among the 'big names' like Larry Sparks, Adam Steffey, Ned Luberecki (and the list goes on and on) – is you'll find them to be genuine, 'down-home' folks. As we chit-chatted with fans and performers alike during the entire festival, you could sense the sincere appreciation fans had for the performers. More importantly, we could sense the reciprocal appreciation the performers have for the fans who support them at festivals, the CD and merchandise purchases, and broadcasts on local NPR stations or Bluegrass Junction.

I recall Paul Pope (Calabogie Road's banjo player at that time) sitting in a bag chair next to Greg Cahill from Special Consensus, covering all kinds of topics from banjo brands to strings, heads, tuners, capos – and then onto topics not even music-related. At one point when Greg meandered off to interact with someone else, Paul shook his head and pronounced, "You know, I couldn't get within 1000 yards of the lead guitar player for Led Zeppelin, but I can spend 45 minutes with one of the best banjo players in the world – a Grammy-nominated performer. Incredible!"

At WMBMA, we've been working closely with the headliners to give them the opportunity to interact with everyone present at our festivals. We host lunches and dinners for, and 'sponsor' the bands, coordinate 'Celebrity Jam Sessions' with them during the dinner hour, and work to see if they can participate in and/or conduct various workshops. As a festival-goer, the 'approachability' of bluegrass performers is second to none. With everything our WMBMA festivals have to offer – camping, jamming, workshops, great music, and – above all – the outstanding camaraderie among fans and performers alike, it's an experience well worth the price of admission! So share everything you enjoy about bluegrass festivals with family and friends, and encourage them to make a weekend out of it at JuneGrass, June 30 and July 1. They can easily get 'up close and personal' with performers and fans alike.

Let's keep this ball rolling!

Mark Walker

Calabogie Road Bluegrass Band

(WMBMA Board Member, Promotions, and VERY Humble Webmaster)