

# SAPPY TIMES

WITHING YOUR WITHOUT SINCE 2009.

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## *Sunday*

*(looking back on Saturday)*

July 31, 2011

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*I am your pamphleteer*, John K Samson sings, and if John K Samson were our pamphleteer, if he wrote these *Sappy Times*, the metaphors would be better, and every line would rhyme.

Saturday, July 30, 2011 was one of the greatest days in the history of SappyFest - no lie, no lie. I still have not gone to sleep because I do not want it to end. The stars are out. Everyone I meet is so happy. Perhaps I will never go to sleep, just live on in this Saturday, pouring a lifetime into it. My notebook has too many pleasures to fit on these pages. My pen is short of ink. Tomorrow there will be sun. These stars will still be out, but they'll be hidden.

Here are some things I do not have room to tell you about:

- The people dancing on the van;
- Jesse Dangerously, rapping *from a book*;
- Owen Pallett playing Super Mario Bros, as Wooden Wives cover the Dead Milkmen;
- Woodshed Orchestra, impromptu in the beer tent, that joyous glinting mood, the air so eager you could cut it with a birthday cake;
- So many good bands.

Hidden Words play forested chamber pop, Baha'i as a kite, with cello, violin, trombone, scampering suitcase percussion. Alden Penner sings scripture the way he sang about tuff ghosts with the Unicorns, the way he sang about the dragon's mouth with Clues: catchily. While they play so gently I watch two four-year-old boys playing. They are clenching their fists and going "Grrrrr," as if overcome with Hulkamania. One of them kicks the other in the crotch. In English, in French and in Spanish, Alden sings about paradise, peace and God.

During the "Unity Prayer", sweet and forceful, a toddler falls and scrapes his hand. The kid bursts open into tears. His dad picks him up. "It's ok, bud," he says. Buds are young flowers.

A little later, Greg MacPherson plays some quiet songs v v v loudly. It is rare to hear music that is both frantic and deliberate. Mist is gathering in the tent. Greg shakes and slides across the stage as if his guitar is pushing him around, as if he is taking a few shoves so that there is the pretence for a fight. He and the bassist smack the necks of their instruments, like lightning saying: *Thunder, thunder, c'mon.*

Later, inside the Vogue Theatre, Little Scream play tender songs filled with noise, ozone, storm smell. There is feedback all over their first tunes, like little boxes are getting thrown

## FREE!

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open, ghosts flying out. There is guitar, fiddle, organ, bass flute, a drummer like a scrambling patrol. The music is strident and hurtling, led by Laurel Sprengelmeyer's high voice. She asks questions and summons demolitions. Her band-mates whistle. On "Red Hunting Jacket", with savage flute, slammed drums, clapped hands, they chase off whatever ghosts are left.

With Sandro Perri, the mood in the Vogue changes. Here are soft, bending jams. Here are grooves golden and natural, like tame lions. Here is funk from high orbit, near the circling sun. Sandro has a pretty voice and a sick band: percussion, woodwinds, synths, bass. He doesn't always use a guitar strap. I imagine he feels that for a song to be good, you have to be able to carry it. Eventually the band plays "Wolfman", which is lengthy and magnificent, and this music is no longer just intricate soft-rock, solar jazz: it is frilled, bloomed, the way certain flowers leave dye on your fingers.

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John K Samson sings the one about hating Winnipeg, the one about the kid with cake in his hair, the one written from the perspective of a cat. The audience is filled with people who know all the words, even to the old songs; who murmur them, softly, as if we are reminding ourselves. Very few of us have ever heard these tracks this way - on plain acoustic guitar, without the rest, without the Weakerthans. In these long moments, it is easy to imagine the lyrics alone, just poetry. We are an audience in late afternoon, murmuring John's stanzas.

"I'm so glad that you exist," John sings. These are old songs but we find we are etched in the same places that we used to be. And the others, the newcomers, who do not know John's songs: they murmur too, with new etchings.

Later the crowd goes wild for Bonjay's spectral dancehall. Beside us there is one man who is not dancing. He wears stripes, hands at his sides. I wonder: Are you from a province that doesn't have music? Do you know what a good time is *for*? Alanna is giving a relatively graphic, gasping demonstration of some of his options. The beats wheeze & heave to "Faat Gyal", the weekend's second Caribou cover.

Suddenly Alanna is belting it, promising things, loud deep give-a-shit. The man does not budge. He is stone. He is carrying all our stillness, in case we need it.

Charles Bradley comes out in a red and gold suit, flying like a screaming soul eagle. We cheer, but not yet knowing. His band is magic, treasure, the finest things you could find. Charles Bradley squints at us through the fog. Still, we do not know. Then there is a break, a beat, and the 63-year-old parts his lips. He sings. He sings like a torch thrown onto a house. There is smoke & heat & unassailability. Striving love, a man's hot breath. Now we know. Charles Bradley is singing a song about the murder of his brother and now we know.

He sings ten thousand beautiful things. He does the splits, gyrates, gives us hugs. He covers Neil Young's "Heart of Gold" and I am almost crying as he sings, "I am getting old." It is not that he is an old man: it is that he is showing us his soul, singing us his soul, the things he has wanted, lost, won. "I love you" he shouts, crying, sweating, "I love *you*," breaking and mending my heart. That electric guitar, so sweet, sweeter than honey, behind him. This tent is full of gifts, gold soundz, held up, clutched hands, running us empty, right yes [HORNS HORNS HORNS] right now. - SM

#### JEFF'S WEATHER REPORT

Saturday found your humble meteorologist lodged behind a table at the Legion but reports indicate that downtown Sackville was under a serious no pressure system for much of the late morning and early afternoon. This, as everyone knows, gave way to sheets of rain. Risking pathetic fallacy one might suggest that it was sappy weather: the sky couldn't contain its emotions, whether in recollection of the previous day's shark attack or in anticipation of what was to come, including John K. Samson's stealthily heartbreaking set later that evening. When the sky was cried out, a shimmering rainbow appeared over the Tantramar Marsh on the edge of town, promising another pot of gold night. A woman at the zine fair called the weather "unreal."

Later, when the condensation from our collective breath gathered over the main stage like patches of displaced Atlantic fog, I thought of her words. Unreal weather for a semi-fictional realm called SappyFest. - JM