

REVIEW OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY 2023 FALL OUTDOOR EVENTS

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October 30, 2023

Introduction

In previous years, this publication provided descriptions, reviews, and ratings of the four major St. Mary's County outdoor Fall festivals and musical events, which were (1) the *St. Mary's County Oyster Festival*, (2) Historic Sotterly outdoor events, (3) the *St. Mary's County Fair*, and (4) the 7th District Optimist Club/St. Clément's Hundred *Blessing of the Fleet*. Given the enhanced and prominent status of the Port of Leonardtown Winery outdoor music offerings, this publication includes it as the fifth major continuous outdoor Fall event.

This publication shall not go into detail on the entertainment offerings and ratings of these events as they are much the same as previous years and the reader may review the previous years' descriptions and ratings to gain a sense of the 2023 reviews. Instead, this publication shall focus on the critical elements of these events and their attainment of success that makes them great and worthy of attendance, or their programming failures making them deficient and unworthy of public support.

The publisher of this website for four years served as the Chairman of the then highly acclaimed and successful *Blessing of the Fleet* and is well experienced in and knowledgeable of what is necessary to provide a quality event. Researching as to what is required in order to conduct a successful outdoor event one shall note the necessity to provide at least one main entertainment stage, and from event beginning to end, make the "Highest and Best Use" of that stage, which is almost always live music. Research affirms that the highest and best use of the main stage is almost always continuous live music with very few exceptions such as the *Reggie Rice Magic Show*.

While the review of these events shall concentrate on their musical offerings, it shall focus mostly on presentation rather than music quality as all the musical entities are of a professional nature and stature the *Amish Outlaws* notwithstanding.

The following are the reviews of these five outdoor events from best to worst with the *St. Mary's County Oyster Festival*, Sotterly Plantation *Heritage Festival*, and the Port of Leonardtown Winery music events as among the best, and the *St. Mary's County Fair* and the 7th District Optimist Club/St. Clément's Hundred *Blessing of the Fleet* as the worst for musical offerings.

The publisher also provides at least one recommendation to improve and enhance each of these five events.

St. Mary's County Oyster Festival

The October 21st and 22nd *St. Mary's County Oyster Festival* is this publisher's favorite Fall outdoor event of the five rated Fall events. This is in part given a fondness for all things oysters, but also because this celebration is so well crafted and orchestrated. This event may appear to be an adult only devised event but also has pleasing offerings that serve the interests of children.

The main commentary now focuses on its live music offerings. This two-day event had live music on both days from event beginning to the end. The provided music was a variety of popular music styles and utilized mostly local musical talent, which is extensive in St. Mary's County.

It is clear the Festival administrator well understood that an outdoor event such as this must have live music from event beginning to end making the "Highest and Best Use" of the main stage capturing public attention. The main stage was in a roof covered pavilion with open sides, and there was adequate public seating and electrical power that well suited each band. The outside of the pavilion was surrounded by picnic tables that were continually occupied such that attendees could eat meals and be entertained by music.

The Saturday bands were (1) *Blair Ritch Project*, (2) *Bootleggers*, (3) *One Trick Pony*, (4) *Wiskers*, and (5) *Monkey Business*. The Sunday bands were (1) *Bushmill*, (2) *Great Expectations*, (3) *Fast Eddie and the Boyz*, and (4) *Gary Jay and the Fire*. All were fine choices offering a variety of music and the publisher particularly enjoyed the *Bootleggers*, *One Trick Pony*, *Fast Eddie and the Boyz*, and *Monkey Business*. The inside of the pavilion and the picnic tables were packed w/people.

Recommendation for Improvement

The one area of improvement would be an enhancement of the stage live music broadcasting throughout the event. The Public Announcement (PA) system continually broadcasted throughout the event previously recording music from nationally known bands. If the event is to broadcast music throughout the festival grounds, it is far better that the music come from the live music pavilion bands. In so doing, in addition to entertaining the festival attendees, it also would continually alert the public of who is performing live, and they may then wish to personally attend the live music in the music pavilion.

Historic Sotterley Southern Maryland Heritage Festival

This was the publisher's 2nd favorite Fall outdoor event featuring live music from show beginning to end.

For this October 7th and 8th event, the Saturday music bands and entertainment were (1) *All Funked Up*, (2) *All Jacked Up*, (3) *Reggie Rice Fool of Illusions Show*, and (4) *Larry Quade Band*. The Sunday music bands and entertainment were (1) *Hollywood Boys*, (2) *Nole Duke and Friends*, (3) *Bay Country Boys*, (4) *Reggie Rice Fool of Illusions Show*, and (4) *Last Shot Band*. This was a great event.

Recommendation for Improvement

It would be well if the music were broadcast through a PA system to the public.

The Port of Leonardtown Winey Live Music

The third quality event was the Port of Leonardtown Winery music offerings. The Winery has live music every weekend though most of the year. This review focuses on the music of one of these days on October 21st.

Over the past several years, the Winey has made substantial enhancements to its grounds allowing for live music. It has an extensive quality canvass coverings with sides and windows such that the public has protection from sun, wind, and rain. It also has a vast outdoor grounds area for a large gathering of people. It has some outdoor tables, chairs, and umbrellas, but it would be well for attendees to also bring their own lawn chairs and portable table and umbrella as they are in limited supply. There is ample wine available as well as other beverages and some food offerings.

There also is a large, enclosed pavilion for gatherings, and some entertainment lawn devices for children as well as adults.

The main addition to accommodate the performances of musical bands and acts is a stage large enough to at least accommodate a band of four to six musicians, with six a bit of a stretch, but four comfortably fit on the stage.

The publisher now shall relate the experience of the band that performed on the 21st that the public and bands may be aware of limiting issues to performances. The publisher shall not comment on the quality of the band itself other than to say it, like other bands and individual performers on other days, they all were outstanding and well received and appreciated by the large audience even providing money tips even though none were requested.

The publisher also would note as a matter of disclosure that coincidentally the band that performed on the 21st was his wife's band. The Band was listed as the

ZBAND, and sometimes it has been known as the **DRZBAND**, co-headed by 77-year-old Nancy Lord Zearfoss, Ph.D., Public Policy and Management, John Glenn School of Public Affairs, The Ohio State University, and Analyst-in-Charge of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) oversight by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) retired, and CASA Volunteer. However, this band is now known as the *Kung Fusion Band*. The publisher wanted the band to call itself "*The Jimmies & the Sook*," but the-would-be Sook was not having any part of that name.

Kung Fusion has Nancy on lead female vocals and keyboards, EJ Allen on outstanding lead guitar as one of the best anywhere and lead male vocals, Brian Sullivan on bass and vocals, and George Miles on drums. They perform a verity of popular rock and blues music from the 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's, and current as well as some originals, such as the Country spoof song by EJ, "My Dog Got Drunk and Stole My Pickup Truck."

The one area of suggested improvement for bands is enhanced electrical supply for speakers, monitors, controllers, amps, keyboards, and other electrically powered equipment. This band uses the state-of-the art Yamaha Line 6 StageSource StageScape digital speaker system where every speaker and monitor is self-powered and synchronized as well as all the amps and other musical equipment. While their full 11,000W system of four main speakers and two bass speakers, that would sound-cover an entire football field, they only brought two of their 1,400W speakers as well as a 1,400W monitor and two 800W monitors along with their amps, etc. There was not enough electrical power available to power all their equipment and so they could not use the two 800W monitors affecting their hearing ability of what they were playing and singing. As a high-quality band, they overcame that problem, but they had to take the time to figure out their system was not properly working due to lack of provided electrical power and reconfigure the digital setup. It is very likely other four, five-piece bands have had similar problems with a lack of access and shortage of electrical power, but also made it work with what they had, and did not feel compelled to comment on the problem. Fortunately, the comments from the audience were that they could hear the sound loud and clear from all over the grounds and that the band was terrific. While this band does not put out a tip jar, there were many such gifts, which included a \$20 bill.

Recommendation for Improvement

In conclusion, the only recommendation to the Winery is that it provide adequate electrical power for bands that have top-quality state-of-the-art sound systems.

The only bands and individuals the stage currently can properly accommodate are those with low-end, low-quality, rudimentary sound systems. One outdoor two-outlet electrical plug system at the middle back of the stage may suffice, but the best electrical power system, with perhaps something in between, would be an outdoor two-outlet system at each stage corner and the front and back middle of the stage allowing any equipment configuration including fans for the summer.

St. Mary's County Fair

The *St. Mary's County Fair* was September 22nd through September 25 covering four days. Unfortunately, one of the main days was rained out. Thus, the publisher cannot provide a complete evaluation of the event.

However, the *Fair* was mostly what one would expect of a quality county fair, with one notable absence exception that follows, and please see last year's review as this year's event followed the script of last year. The *County Fair* was again a high-quality event with one exception: the lack of live music from local bands and musicians. The Fair eliminated live music beginning last year, and the publisher was told that was due to lack of public interest, which is a misnomer and instead is a matter of *County Fair* lacking in providing and publicizing live music rather than the absence of public interest.

In prior years, the *County Fair* rightly used the music pavilion for live music bands, but the music offerings were limited and sporadic, not well publicized, and surrounding the pavilion was farm equipment precluding public access and seating resulting in a less than expected audiences. Contrast what the *County Fair* did or did not do with that of the *Oyster Festival* and *Sotterley*. Both the *Sotterley* event, and the *Oyster Festival* in the County Fairgrounds music pavilion, had live music from event beginning to end on all its days, the music was well publicized with high-quality mostly local bands and musicians, and the *Oyster Festival* had surrounded the open-sided music pavilion with picnic tables accommodating a continuous large gathering of people eating and enjoying music.

The one positive addition for both the *Oyster Festival* and *County Fair* would be to broadcast the live music throughout the County Fairgrounds through PA system. This way, the public would know of the music offerings, who is playing and when with high-quality music, and therefore entice attendance for those who have an interest in a particular type of music. The *Oyster Festival* used the *County Fair* PA system to continually broadcast prerecorded music of notable national bands, and instead why not broadcast the live music of local bands from the pavilion? This should be a non-brainer action by both the *Oyster Festival* and *County Fair*.

The publisher, having experience in booking bands and providing a sound system for the *Blessing of the Fleet*, and providing his \$25,000 state-of-the-art nine speaker digital 14,000W sound system for the last *Christmas in April* event at the County Fairgrounds in the main auditorium, would volunteer at his expense to provide his sound system over the four days, and to book a variety of bands at a reasonable cost to the County Fair with an agreed upon budget for bands. The publisher is willing to do this for the sake of the *County Fair* that sorely misses and needs live music to be a complete *County Fair* event.

No *County Fair* is complete without live music from local bands and musicians. Lest the County Fair organizers forget, one purpose of a county fair and other like events is to showcase the talent of county residents. Thus, the *St. Mary's County Fair* is incomplete and has an obligation to highlight the vast musical talent of St. Mary's County residents.

Recommendation for Improvement

The one recommendation therefore is to bring back musical bands each day from event beginning to end, put them in the music pavilion with stage, surround the pavilion in picnic tables and chairs/bleachers, provide adequate publicity about the bands, and broadcast the bands' performances from the PA system.

7th District Optimist Club/St. Clément's Hundred *Blessing of the Fleet*

The *Blessing of the Fleet* differed from last year in several respects, and so the publisher cannot provide a complete evaluation comparison of this year's event of September 30th. The main difference is the change of venue from the Colton's Point Museum location to historic St. Mary's City due to a construction issue regarding the museum. The event properly also was one day only on Saturday rather than the past of a two-day Saturday and Sunday event.

Outdoor events are limited in what they can provide in terms of entertainment due to the grounds location and offerings. Thus, it would be unfair to be too critical not knowing the location limits at St. Mary's City. Thus, the publisher shall limit this review to what can be rightfully critical.

Over the past few years, the *Blessing of the Fleet* greatly scaled back its cost of entertainment offerings primarily for children hiring a more costly out of area band to satisfy someone's ego in having hired such a band. For the four years the publisher served as Chairman of this event, as a tribute to the previous Chairman, Robert Steele Pogue, he largely continued and carried out the programming excellence that Robert built up over the years he served as Chairman. Due to rainouts, the main change the publisher made was to negotiate and eliminate

entertainment cost obligations in the case of a weather-related event cancelation. For example, all musical bands and entertainment acts had to agree to forgo the event's payment obligations to them if they were unable to play and perform due to adverse weather and perform as long as they were provided prior notice not to travel to Colton's Point. This meant that the publisher could only hire and book local musical talent and forgo out-of-area musical bands to eliminate financial risk. This was in keeping with the guiding financial principles behind "Cost Risk Analyses" or as primo guitarist Donny Malloy termed it, "No Play No Pay."

Fortunately, this did not in any way degrade the quality musical offerings of the event. St. Mary's County has a vast array of musical talent and there is no need to go outside the County to book musical talent. As an example, when the publisher served as Chairman, he hired and booked Pat Woodburn and *Six Gun South* to be the main fireworks band. Pat graciously declined payment when the event was rained out but played in the next available year's event.

It would be the height of irresponsibility to hire out of area bands, let alone out of state bands, that would require payment no matter the circumstances where there is no need to hire such risky bands given our vast local musical talent that far exceeds that of the two bands that performed this past year.

For the third year in a row, the 7th District Optimist Club/St. Clément's Hundred hired the rock band, *Amish Outlaws* from Pennsylvania as the principal "Fireworks" band.

First, the primary draw for later in the day is the fireworks and not the *Amish Outlaws* band. There are numerous area bands far better than the *Amish Outlaws* the would be just as attractive if not more so to an audience and attendance. This event does not need to pay an exorbitant sum of money for a risky fireworks band such as the *Amish Outlaws* as any quality band would be just fine in terms of public draw and appreciation given the attraction of the fireworks. More than likely, hiring the *Amish Outlaws* served to satisfy an emotional need for whomever was responsible for hiring the *Amish Outlaws*, and just as likely, also was to that individual's personal financial benefit in terms of a paid commission. Is it not better to financially help a local band and our local economy than to the financial benefit of a band from another state as well as its booking agent?

Second, the main intent of the Blessing of the Fleet is to recognize and honor the ethical principle and religious tenets upon which St. Mary's County and the State of Maryland was founded – that of Religious Freedom and Religious Tolerance. There are road signs all over St. Mary's County that read and tout "Religious

Freedom” and even one building on the St. Mary’s County Fairgrounds is named “Tolerance Hall” for the principle upon our County was founded – Religious Tolerance. What do these organizations do but hire the *Amish Outlaws* band that is a religious insult and affront to our Amish community. Religious Tolerance means the freedom to respect and honor all religious faiths and not the freedom to mock and ridicule disrespecting a specific religion, which in the case is the Amish religion.

So, what band shall they next hire – The “Catholic Outlaws” with band members prancing around the stage in priest and nun clothing draped in Rosery beads and crosses, or the “Protestant Outlaws,” “Evangelical Outlaws,” or “Holy Roller Outlaws” dancing around while handling snakes, or “Jewish Outlaws” or “Yiddish Outlaws” with band members garbed in Hasidic clothing, or “Mormon Outlaws” with band members dressed as Brigham Young surrounded by their many sexy, sultry wives by their sides.

While the publisher is critical of the County Fair for not having live music with area bands, better that then to have hired the *Amish Outlaws*.

Fireworks are always pleasing no matter that they do not meet minimum industry professional standards for amount of color as opposed to a predominance of white/silver, and their in-air frequency between fireworks launches, where this year’s fireworks again were likewise deficient in this respect.

Recommendation for Improvement

There are so many areas of needed improvement that the publisher shall just cite a few. When the publisher was the Chairman, he cut the event from two days to one as his research showed that the second day of a two day event has half the attendance or less on the second day, and such an event must have the attendance of the *Oyster Festival*, *Historic Sotterly*, or the *County Fair* to justify a second day, which the *Blessing of the Fleet* does not have.

However, the publisher was able to combine all the main acts and activities of both days into one day beginning with a parade and ending with the fireworks.

First, the main area of recommended improvement is to do as the *Oyster Festival* and *Historic Sotterly* are doing and that is to have on the main stage live music from event beginning to end using only area bands. Second, contract with a professional fireworks company that for the same cost to provide fireworks

display that meets industry standards of excellence for color and frequency. Finally, even though it shall cost money, for the children's sake, bring back the entertainment of past events when the publisher was Chairman, such as the *Reggie Rice Magic Show*, *Baloon Nerd Magic Show* with Brian Garner, Baloon Nerd balloon persoanl twisting for kids, *Blue Sky Puppet Theater* with Michael Colter, *Chris Cambell Show*, *Foundation Heroes* (Spiderman, Hulk Hogan, Batman & the Batmobile, etc.) and face painting with Margaret Laduca. The *Blessing of the Fleet* could well afford these highly acclaimed children's entertainment acts for the sake of our kids rather than satisfy someone's ego and perhaps pocketbook if it eliminated the unnecessary exorbitant costs and financial risk of out-of-state music bands when so many of our local bands are better attractions.

Overall Summery

The top three Fall outdoor events for live music were the *St. Mary's County Oyster Festival*, the *Historic Sotterly Southern Maryland Heritage Festival*, and the *Port of Leonardtown Winery Musical Events*. The bottom two were the *St. Mary's County Fair* and the 7th District Optimist Club/St. Clément's Hundred *Blessing of the Fleet*.

Interesting that the top three events were planned, organized, and administered by women and the bottom two by men. However, what can one expect of such socially backward organizations as the 7th District Optimist Club and the St. Clements Hundred where they do not have any members of color and the Optimist Cub that does not even allow women to be members.

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