

MUSIC

The Haverford Music Festival is a family affair

by [A.D. Amorosi, For the Inquirer](#), Posted: September 6, 2018



NINA FICHERA

This weekend's Haverford Music Festival with Sloan, John Paul White, Pi Power Trio, and 29 additional hard pop, weird rock and country-inspired acts on four different stages may be its eighth annual gathering. But, in reality, this fest's roots go back 20 years to when the Ficheras hit town. That's when Al, Nicole, Nina, and Alex moved from a tiny rowhouse in South Philly to the bucolic burbs, and applied their diverse talents to the fest's booking, design, and organization.

"There are many talented folks here that do a lot for this community, so this is way for me to use my skills to show my civic pride," says Al Fichera, a live-band booker at the former Glasboro State College (now Rowan University)-turned-producer of locals such as Flight of Mavis and Kenn Kweder.

"Our Haverford Music Festival is family-friendly, gender-balanced, and 'neighborhood-y,' but in a sophisticated way," he says. "Along with the family, we have a board that works as volunteers for seven months to make this one day of music happen."

Nicole — an art director for Oldies.com, their Collectables CD label, and Alpha Video DVDs — does all the festival graphics, including signage, poster, fliers, ads, and programs. "For a lack of a better word, I'm also Al's secretary," she adds, "making sure artists return commitment letters, stage plots, etc. With 32 performers it gets crazy, especially considering that four times that many acts apply to play through our website every year." While Nicole also acts as band chauffeur, meal planner and merch-table mistress during the fest, daughter Nina documents all fest activity with still and video cameras. Then, there's Alex Fichera (currently in his sophomore year in the Music Industry program at Drexel), who has played the family fest, first with his debut band Made Modern two years ago, and now with in his new band, Psychic Agency.

"It's the best music that ever was made," says Nicole, Alex's loving mother, of Psychic Agency's new album, *Blush*. (And no, Al Fichera did not produce that, or any of his son's albums. "The first I heard the completed *Blush* was on iTunes.")

Such love of varied music comes from the Fichera family hanging at home and listening to each other's multi-genre collection. "Headphones or loud speakers, there's *always* music playing in our house," says Al.

The family of four didn't start the party — Haverford Civic Council did that. Yet, since joining Haverford Music Festival's fund-raising committee four years ago, and becoming its music director, Al has been able to add clout and clever music to the fest's familial vibe. As time has passed, he able to book incrementally bolder names such as Grammy winner Lisa Loeb and Matthew Sweet, who made his first appearance in the area in six years.

"There are so many other festivals that bookings are hard for the smaller ones, as large corporate festivals have big budgets and industry clout," says Al. "Our goal in programming is to bring quality artists — local, national, and international — that are underexposed in this area."

For Sept. 8's Haverford Music Festival, that means John Paul White, the cofounder of the rustic The Civil Wars, and an "elegant songwriter, respected by peers as diverse as Rodney Crowell and Taylor Swift," says Al; and

Canada's power-pop perennials Sloan, whose new album, *12*, may be the very best and most diverse of its career. "Hyperbole aside, I don't believe there is a better band in this classic format working today. – they're four quality songwriters," he said.

Pi Power Trio member Sasha Dobson says that it's Al Fichera's deep and abiding love for music of all stripes that plays a huge role in how he's shaped the Haverford showcase. "His affinity for a world of different styles of music must have to do with the great choices he makes in curating the music for the festival," says the singer and drummer who has worked with Norah Jones and their band, Puss 'n' Boots.

"We are trying to carve out our own special niche in the musical landscape," says Al of making his sleepy, little burg a little nosier just one day every year "We love our sponsors because we are still and will remain, a free-admission festival. And I am always really happy when one of our neighbors send us notes that read, 'enjoyed the music all day from start to finish.' "