

Music, films, and music films

Admittedly, each year when the Sundance Program Guide raises its multi-media head, I first check out what films with any sort of a musical connotation are listed, along with the schedule for the Music Café and any other live shows that feature acts within my musical wheelhouse that I may, through whatever underhanded or backdoor means, be able to access.

This year I jumped into the cultural melee on Friday morning and never came up for air until late Saturday night. Even the daylight I burned in the Park City Library upon first arriving in town had a musical motivation.

With tickets going on sale at 10:00 am that morning for a “Rodriguez” (Searching for Sugarman) concert at The Depot on April 29 and with me still unable to figure out how to purchase tickets online with my cell phone, I made sure I was sitting at one of the library’s computers when zero hour rolled around. Somehow I didn’t drop the ball this time. I’m holding!

And you can’t beat the library for killing time before heading up to grab an early spot in line at the Music Café. Cracking up over the prose styles of (in the order I pulled them off the shelves) Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Thomas Pynchon, William Gibson, Richard Powers, David Foster Wallace, and Hunter Thompson, is a great way to manipulate the clock.

Oftentimes when I show up in line early at the Music Café, so as to procure my favorite standing spot with good sight lines and a table upon which to rest a beverage, I have to leave early for a film or panel. Such was not the case Friday.

I was able to catch Emily Wells quite interesting one-woman-electronic-loop-orchestra shtick which was followed by a couple of gifted Canadian performers, first the jazzy torch-singing Jill Barber who also included a couple of songs in French from her latest recording and then the powerhouse R&B vocalist Melanie Fiona.

I hadn’t heard of any of them, which, historically, is a good thing. My favorite memories of the music Café are when I stumbled upon a new act with which, at the time, I was unfamiliar - like Kelly Joe Phelps, Joseph Arthur, Jill Sobule, Patty Griffen, Buddy Miller, Clem Snide, Kings of Leon, Mary Gauthier, Nelly McKay, Los Pinguos, Darrell Scott, Silversun Pickups, Grace Potter, The Low Anthem, and The Civil Wars.

The final act at the Music Café on Friday was a trio who went by the moniker “Blue Sky Riders.” In that Kenny Loggins was a member of the group, I must admit I wasn’t all that excited beforehand. But he never once called undue attention to himself.

His bandmates, however, Georgia Middleman and Gary Burr, took care of those chores in an oftentimes cutting and humorous fashion. Instrumental and vocal virtuosos all, it was their accomplished songwriting and arranging skill-sets that truly set them apart. Crackerjack harmonies, I might add!

It was then, following the Music Café sets, that I met up with my equally-musically-active son, Smokey. With about three-hours to kill before they opened the doors for Dave Grohl’s Sound City Players show at Park City Live, it was pretty much a no-brainer as to where to while-away the time. Due to its proximity, the No Name Saloon, the old Alamo, served that function well.

At AC/DC and Metallica romps in the past, it’s always been Smokey who interpreted the evening’s music for me. And, if nothing else, with Dave Grohl bringing with him the remains of Nirvana plus the Foo Fighters, along with a whole slew of rockers from his Sound City film, I had no doubt that translations would be in order.

One after another he was called upon to explain Alain Johannes (Queens of the Stone Age), Chris Goss, Brad Wilk (Rage Against the Machine), Lee Ving, Corey Taylor (Slipknot), and Krist Novoselic (Nirvana). Even I could recognize Rick Nielsen (Cheap Trick), Rick Springfield (General Hospital), John Fogerty (Creedence), and Stevie Nicks (Fleetwood Mac). Seventeen rock legends for over three hours made for one amazing show!

The next day, after some much-needed eardrum and body recuperation, we headed off to the Screening Room at Sundance Resort to catch Grohl's film "Sound City," which featured interviews with everyone in the concert plus additional alumni of the iconic studio. Tom Petty and Neil Young are prominent in the film.

The siren's call of Sound City, a strip mall of a recording studio in Van Nuys, California that refused sanitation in any form, was a large room that recorded drums better than any other and a custom-built Neve 8028 60-channel flying fader soundboard that Grohl later purchased and moved into his own digs. One fine music doc! See it if you can!