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Musical Oasis

Dustin Pittsley and friends get away and get eclectic with Stone River Music Festival

By G.K. Hizer

When I first caught wind of Stone River Music festival, I was admittedly late to the party. After all, word had already started to spread and when I mentioned it to a few of my friends; they were already aware and knew more details than I did at the time. Nevertheless, I was immediately excited and sold on the idea when I ran into Dustin Pittsley at Jesse Aycock's CD release party at The Church this summer, making an already magical evening that much better.

If you haven't heard yet, Stone River Music Festival is being held this weekend at "Seven Springs Amphitheater" in Chandler, Okla., just three miles north of I-44 on highway 18 at the Chandler exit when driving toward Oklahoma City. Located on a wooded, 40-acre parcel of land owned by Pittsley's parents, Jim and Vicki Pittsley, the festival will be a three-day celebration of roots-based Oklahoma music ranging from rock to blues, folk, Red Dirt and everything else across the spectrum.

When speaking with Dustin Pittsley last week, I asked him what inspired (or perhaps, possessed) him to tackle the task of holding yet another festival. As he explained it, he and some musician friends had gotten together on the land a few times and thought it would be an incredible spot to make something happen. After pondering the idea, Pittsley says "It just kind of happened, really..."

As a plan came together, Pittsley started calling friends and bands to gauge interest and, in January, the planning began to get serious. Since then Pittsley's family has worked the land, making great strides to create a small infrastructure, including building a stage and festival area, clearing camping areas and creating paths throughout the land.

For three days this weekend, the grounds will open for the inaugural event, drawing on 14 acts to fill Friday and Saturday evening with music. Saturday afternoon will feature the Folk Salad acoustic showcase and Sunday will wrap up with a nearly two hour Gospel set with Tom Skinner and Don Morris before the music comes to a close and everyone departs to return home and to work for the week.

While the lineup and rural location instantly reminds me of the Red Dirt Harvest Festival that was held for consecutive years at Grape Ranch Winery in Okemah, Stone River is broader in scope. When asked about the lineup, Pittsley said, "I love blues festivals and Red Dirt festivals, but I wanted this to be more roots based and eclectic."

To get started with the lineup, Pittsley called a few friends and called upon the people who have affected him most as an artist.

"Yes, these are my friends," he said, "but at the same time, they've made a huge mark on Oklahoma music and I just happen to be lucky enough to call them my friends."

Mostly, however, the motivating factor was to showcase Oklahoma artists that don't get enough recognition, especially in the rural areas outside of Tulsa, and bring a showcase of that talent to an area and group of people that might not otherwise travel to Tulsa to hear these acts. At the same time, it provides a great getaway for those of us here who love these bands,



Friendly Affair. "Yes, these are my friends," Dustin Pittsley said of the festival lineup, "but at the same time, they've made a huge mark on Oklahoma music and I just happen to be lucky enough to call them my friends."

but are ready for a weekend away to relax.

Friday night's lineup opens with Little Chairs at 5pm and plays well into the night with Klondike 5, Whirligig, Jesse Aycock Band, Paul Benjamin Band, Dustin Pittsley Band and Freakshow. Saturday will then open at noon with the Folk Salad acoustic showcase before Red Dirt Rangers take the stage at 4:30pm and Klondike 5 String Band again takes the stage to transition into and even more eclectic and electric evening with Steve Pryor, Fiawna Forte, Dustin Pittsley, Tom Skinner's Science Project, Randy Crouch and the Flying Horse Opera and Pilgrim to close the evening.

The afternoon showcase may be the most enlightening of the weekend, however, shedding light on artists like Little Joe McLerran, Charlie Munn, Cody & Desi, Sage Flower, Jeff Martinson and Wink Burcham, as well as anyone else who might happen to make a guest appearance as the day goes on and friends share the stage.

Since this is the first year for the festival and first event at this site, the weekend will include primitive camping with no running water or electricity. Potable water will be available in tanks, however, and plans are already on place for electricity and running water to be on place for next year's event.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the weekend is the location itself. While a weekend away with this lineup is enticing, Pittsley's family has been working and preparing the land over most of the past two years and, as Pittsley said, his father has "turned the forest into damn near a national park." Heavy construction, including extra clearing of land and the creation of the main festival stage has occurred over the past year and now the grounds are ready to be unveiled with whisper generators being brought in to supply power for the staging, sound and lights.

With three loosely designated camping areas, the festival has plenty of space for everyone and families are encouraged to attend. One camping area will be quieter and more family-friendly, while the second will be a little louder and loose, while the third campground will be the one that "gets a little crazy," as Pittsley described it, chuckling.

Gates will open at 3pm this Friday, Sept. 24, and admission is \$15 per day or \$25 for the entire weekend, including free primitive camping. The music is scheduled to begin at 5pm and then the weekend is off to a running start before wrapping up on Sunday afternoon with Tom Skinner and Don Morris hosting a Gospel Hour which will undoubtedly see a host of special friends such as Dustin Pittsley, Jesse Aycock and Jeff Martinson sit in for a few tunes.

If you haven't immersed yourself in the local music scene or have yet to try your hand at a full weekend festival, Stone River is the most enticing offering of the summer, just an hour out of Tulsa to give you a respite from the city and an escapee from work for the weekend. Tickets can be purchased online at ticketstorm.com and full details, including directions, artist lineup and scheduled set times, are posted at stonerivermusicfestival.com.

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