

Overview for UPTON BLUES FESTIVAL 2019 @ Upton upon Severn,
Worcestershire 19th – 21st July 2019



Upton Blues Festival is a multi-award winning festival and continues to grow year on year. This year continued the tradition of great music across the three main stages and pubs throughout the town, all for free. The Campsite Music Stage was just for the discerning campers, of which there were hundreds and the Conway Castle Boat provided entertainment throughout Friday Saturday and Sunday plus a gentle trip up the Severn. This review is just a taster to what was on offer.

Arriving on Thursday, there was plenty of music going on in the pubs in the town and the atmosphere was buzzing. Friday was the first day of the main stage action but the weather was turning. After a wander and brief visits to the Riverside Stage and Big Top Stage we headed to the new Acoustic Stage in the fabulous church venue.

Friday

Matt Woosey, currently residing in Germany, played an excellent solo set of acoustic blues in the grand environment of the church. With superb sound and an appreciative audience it was certainly an uplifting experience.

Making our way back to the Riverside Stage the rain set in, but this didn't dampen the spirits of those who had come to see the **Achievers**. From Stroud in Gloucestershire their music is a cross over from blues to Americana, but with a freshness that is great to hear within the UK Blues and Roots scene. As a five piece they provided great entertainment and have a new album 'The Lost Arc' soon to be released. They are finalists in the UKBlues Challenge to be held at Bluefunk Rhythm & Blues Club, Poynton, Cheshire in September 2019. Certainly a band I would recommend.



Achievers

Back on the Acoustic Stage, **Mike 'Dr Blue' Mckeon** was giving it large with guitar, kick drum, harmonica and raw gritty vocals. From the deep south in Brighton, musician, singer, songwriter, 'Dr Blue' has entertained audiences with his unique brand of early blues, all over the world and continued to do so with his performance in Upton. For a solo artist, he certainly gives you 'more for your money'. A brilliant performer.

A young lady from Bristol, who has been causing quite a stir was next on the Acoustic Stage. **Elles Bailey** supported on guitar by **Joe Wilkins** just blew the audience away with such a moving performance. She has a unique voice singing the 'blues', with a gradual move into Americana. She showcased a superb new track 'Walk on Water', but the whole of her set was just amazing and one of the high lights for me at the festival.



Elles Bailey and Joe Wilkins

Seasoned performers, **Ian Parker Band** and **Danny Bryant** wowed audiences on the Big Top Stage, but we headed to the Riverside Stage to catch the wonderful **Kyla Brox Band** from Manchester.

Kyla has had an amazing year winning the UKBlues Challenge in September 2018, which led her to represent the UK in the International Blues Challenge in Memphis (reaching the semi-finals) and the European Blues Challenge in The Azores, Portugal, which she won by a mile. Her brand of blues, laced with soul is certainly distinctive and is 'once seen never forgotten'. A fabulous performance at Upton despite the weather, she is certainly in a class of her own.

Saturday

Today is certainly the 'biggest' day with some brilliant music on all the stages. First for us was **Troy Redfern Band**, from Herefordshire, on the Big Top Stage. An excellent performance of blues infused rock with classy slide guitar from Troy and the added interest of a cellist in the band. He was very well received by the crowd.



Troy Redfern Band

We popped into the Acoustic Stage to see **Rowland Jones** from Manchester, with his blues flavoured Americana with hints of jazz.

Strolling back to the Riverside Stage, we looked forward to seeing the masters of the big band sound, the **Chris Bevington Organisation**. From the Stoke area, this nine piece collective of first class musicians have a unique sound. With brass, keys, two leads and backing singers, they set themselves apart on sound. With two albums under their belt and a third in the pot, they were set to cause a stir with their mix of blues, rock and soul. A sterling set with a great full on sound.



Chris Bevington Organisation

Taking some rest bite and a trip on the river on the Conway Castle Boat with the up and coming **Tom C Walker Band**. Tom, from Birmingham, has continued to morph in his music styles. At only 24 he is now riding high, moving from blues rock to funk. A terrific set on the boat as a trio, with the addition of **Christie Reeves** on backing vocals. Tom C Walker Band are certainly ones to watch out for, especially with the addition of brass in the mix, one of my favourite bands on the circuit.



Tom C Walker Band with Christie Reeves

Some class musicianship from the outstanding **Xander and The Peace Pirates**, on the Riverside Stage. With a big crowd gathered in front of the stage the Liverpool lads certainly have become popular icons. With a mix of soul, blues and rock the masters of guitars were evident. Some fabulous playing, from these rising stars.



Xander and The Peace Pirates

Now for the pièce de résistance for me at the festival. **Wille and The Bandits** from the South West absolutely nailed it. With such originality and musical ability they brought in a breath of fresh air. They are not genre specific and cross over through blues, rock, folk and world, which makes them so special. I think the audience said it all with a packed out tent and a rapturous applause for an encore. Wille has a superb style in his vocals and slide guitars, Matt with a six string bass, played like a lead guitar and his expertise in the bespoke upright bass. Andrew, who is really a percussionist rather than a straightforward drummer sews the whole band together. They bounce the sound from one another and are so tuned in to each other, they produce an amazing sound for a trio. Certainly a highlight for me and from what I witnessed from the audience so I would highly recommend them.



Wille and The Bandits (Photo by Rod Inn)

To finish the evening on the Riverside Stage were **Beaux Gris Gris & The Apocalypse**. The American/UK band played a mix of blues, soul and folk which are New Orleans inspired. They certainly gave a lively and exciting performance, fronted by Louisiana born Greta Valenti.

Sunday

The day of rest and a definite day to hang out for a while at the Big Top Stage. Some classic blues from **The Katie Bradley Band** with Katie on vocals and harmonica with the sounds of the Mississippi Delta, with a gospel influence.



The Katie Bradley Band

Buffo's Wake formed a break away from the blues with Balkan folk and punk cabaret, which I think left the audience in shock. Mind you there were plenty of folk getting into the 'party' spirit, so perhaps a change is as good as a rest.



Buffo's Wake

The last visit to the Riverside Stage for the up and coming young **Conor Selby** and band. A rising star, Conor from Essex, is a guitarist who has taken his influences from the great blues artists of the '60s and '70s. An accomplished player with a voice bigger than his years, set fire to the stage with his music. Certainly one to watch out for, especially in the North of England where he has yet to break free. He is a finalist in the UKBlues Challenge to be held at Bluefunk Rhythm & Blues Club, Poynton, Cheshire, in September 2019.



Conor Selby

Another moment of revelation, back at the Big Top Stage, with **Rainbreakers**. From Shrewsbury, the band have been raising their game over the past few years. With tours in Europe and the UK they certainly have honed their performances to a totally professional level. Ben fronts the band on superb vocals and guitar, with Charlie on lead guitar, who I would rate as one of the top players on the circuit today and at twenty-two that is no mean feat. With the back line of Sam on drums and new boy Ash on bass they are a force to be reckoned with. Moving into the realms on rock blues, with a much heavier take, they have a definitive Rainbreakers sound. They went down a storm with the audience and a great end for the festival for us.



Rainbreakers

Money raised from the festival goes to worthy causes, so congratulations go to all the volunteers who worked tirelessly over the weekend to make the festival happen and to all the sponsors who contributed, making **Upton Blues Festival** the best free festival in the country.

Rosy Greer – Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer