

2001
UK
Words and Artwork: Anna Bombshell

Ladyfest 2000,
August 1st thru
6th. one hundred
and forty-four hours of music, art,

performance, workshops,
films, adventures, debates
and laugh until you cry or
pee your pants style fun.

I guess most people were attracted to Ladyfest 2000 by the line-up of rad bands such as Bratmobile, Sleater-Kinney, Bangs, Lois, the Need, Sarah Dougher to name a *few* and the fact that it was happening in the legendary town of Olympia. However I think one of the best things about Ladyfest was that it wasn't just a music festival- there was so much inspiring, productive, creative, activist things going on by girls for the girls from movies, movie talks, performance, art shows, crafts. As well as all this there was the all-important element of interactivity in the workshops that were held on tons and tons of important issues like self-defence, feminism, queer rights, women of colour and learning new skills. There were discos (although they call 'em 'dance parties' round that way) & metal karaoke (!) after the shows finished and there was a really good atmosphere with lots of support and girls enjoying themselves.

It just so happened that I was staying in that part of the world over summer last year anyway & as soon as I reasonably could I organised tickets and a place to stay. We ended up for a few days in this cute but rustic fishing cabin in a woman-owned & run campsite right next to a big lake. Highpoint of the week was almost certainly taking a boat out to go rowing and coming back to 15 skinny-dipping girls. I thought a lot of Olympia- it's a smallish logging/ blue collar town & the state capital of Washington State, made (mainly) female friendly- by not just the cool bands & creative/ artistic atmosphere that have made Olympia notorious but lots of community led health initiatives, support and centres for women etc. There's a load of really cool/ interesting places to visit apart from the whole Ladyfest thing, like the groovy shops, theatre and 20s diner/ bar. Oh yeah, it's the only place where I've ever noticed the bars have happy hour starting at 6am (that's 6am in the morning)!



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I got to see a fair bit of performance pieces and spoken word, which was another new experience for me- One of my faves was the Art Cheerleaders- of queer cheerleaders with radical funny messages and they performed really well. On the last night the show was stolen by the fabulous Penny Arcade a performer from New York talking about childhood, rape and revolution but in a way you've never seen it before! Inga Musico, the author of recent feminist thesis *Cunt* read pages from her diary, showing a real spark of intelligence and naughty sense of humour. One of the scariest things I've ever seen was a girl called Rebecca who did a fire performance while talking about being kidnapped, raped and killed.

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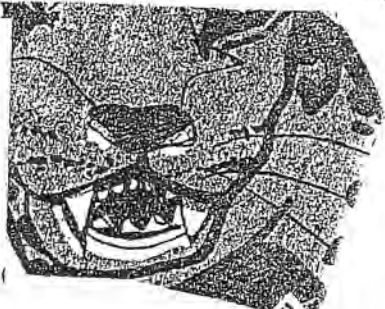
Over the week we saw a ton of bands I'd wanted to see my whole life! Some of the most memorable music performances were Bratmobile- Alison, Molly and Erin truly back on form, Tennessee Twin who are a fab ole country band, including in its line-up Alison Wolfe's twin sister, Sleater-Kinney who were super-fired that night (we almost died in that crowd, man!), The Gossip- a raunchy trio who make you shake yo ass (& they really do *make* you...), The Need who I just about fell in love with- Radio for her cute little hat and her own special charm and Rachel cuz she drums like a demon and gets to wear a headset; Lois, the grande dame of the Oly scene, Mary Timony who's a real innovator using rhythm & melody to express feelings & experiences, Kia Kadiri- noticeably the only black girl on the bill- but she was fly- an underground hip hop artist from Canada: big on improvisation & stunning to watch. There were one or two too many bad bad bad rock bands (imagine a girl version of Spinal Tap!) but overall I'd have to say that the music was definitely fabulous.

Another big part of the week for me was the workshops. There were ones I thought sounded excellent but didn't get a chance to go- for example, self-defence, bike and auto repair, discussion about transgender issues, learning how to play instruments, discussions on men and feminism (wasn't allowed!). I went to one called 'Dismantling Racism' run by a youth group from Portland, which was really interesting and gave me a few new perspectives, and 'Renewal in Art & Activism'. I went to that one since it sounded relevant to me & although everyone rambled a whole lot gave me loads of ideas & things to try out like the importance of asking for help from your friends and taking care of yourself in order to promote change. It was really exciting for me to be in a space where people are totally fired up and have lots of ideas.



Now even though I enjoyed Ladyfest I can't leave it without adding a couple of criticisms. I think it's fair to say that the place was just packed with middle class white girls. These kind of events should be accessible to everyone since everyone benefits from a more diverse crowd and we need to be aware of how our 'scene' is exclusive to many. It's possible to have a more inclusive scene through use of publicity (as in- for a queer group- use some pics of women of color on the posters, supporting civil rights groups to make allies etc etc). My friend loved her time there, but got annoyed with snobby gay girls (she's gay herself but says the only time she's been made to feel uncomfortable is around other queer girls!). Another problem was that there were so many things to go to that it got a bit frustrating to realise that I couldn't possible pack it all in, and it was kinda overwhelming and hard to take everything in. Some people I talked to also felt they were made to feel uncomfortable - either because they were boys (which is *obviously* a bad thing) or because they picked up an atmosphere and explicit things that people said of ' hey this is our town, isn't it cool?...but don't move here!'

Overall though, I got a lot from being a part of Ladyfest. I discovered a whole load of bands and artists I never would have otherwise like Penny Arcade, Rebecca Pearcey the Art Cheerleaders and made some self-discoveries, like maybe I don't love Sleater-Kinney as much as the girls who came out crying, that I think Alison Wolfe is a babe & that people think differently & you need to make an effort to have fun and get things out of events. I guess you can't just expect to go to something like Ladyfest and just take everything. What you get out of an event is a direct result of what you put into it so I realised the importance of making an effort to connect with others and add what you can. I wish the Ladyfest 2001 in Glasgow every success!



>> Glasgow, Scotland, August this year >> don't miss!!
Ladyfest webpage >> www.ladyfest.co.uk

