



into the groove

Festival International de Louisiane celebrates 30 years

BY SARAH RAVITS
PHOTOS BY DAVID SIMPSON

A 25-YEAR-OLD HULA hoops to the live soundtrack of a Moroccan-influenced electronica band from France, so caught up in the trance that she doesn't notice it's raining. Three toddlers splash through a fountain with a babysitter, as their parents occupy themselves a few blocks away, inventing new dance moves to the beat of a celebrated New Orleans brass band. An older couple from Breaux Bridge two-steps in perfect, romantic harmony, as they have been for years to a Cajun group; and a skateboarder whizzes past an ensemble of Native American wind instrumentalists selling CD's outside of what might normally be considered a "college bar" - which is now offering cheap cocktails to go for everyone (who is over 21).

As the sun sets and the rain fades, an ensemble of teens scream as a French Canadian trio of scruffy-bearded hip-hop dudes belt into the microphone, asking to know - in English, and then in French



- if they are ready. And in the back of a crowd, absorbing it all, is a Midwestern observer and an artist from Martinique, who might not have otherwise met - feel like they belong together - trading bites of a falafel sandwich.

No matter the language, age or creed, a universal message can be felt that everyone in Lafayette - already a city known for its friendliness - is warmly embraced during Festival International.

And now it's celebrating an important milestone: its 30th anniversary, from April 20-24.

It began as a small Francophone festival to help boost the economy and morale during a recession in 1986. Now it draws in about 400,000 people each year with musicians, artists and performers from around the world, maintaining its family-friendly, laid-back but celebratory vibe despite swelling numbers.

While other popular music festivals around the country have seen a dramatic increase in ticket fees, Festival International is free and always has been. The festival welcomes artists and performers from all over the globe, while keeping a focus on its deep French-speaking connections. "The festival started off as a Francophone festival, so one of our focuses this year is to connect to those roots," says Ashley Courville,

marketing director, adding that they will be hosting artists and musicians from more than 22 countries around the world.

"We made an effort to make sure we have a high number of French-speaking countries to pay home age and honor the 30th anniversary," she says.

One of the highlights will include a 30-year photography retrospective, a collaboration with UL Lafayette. There is also a Haitian art exhibit that has been on display all month. Other highlights include Louisiana International Music Exchange (LIME), presented by

Festival International de Louisiane and Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission, which promotes and present Louisiana musicians to music industry professionals from around the world, fostering professional networking opportunities and interactions while showcasing Louisiana

musicians. There will also be a 5K - "Courir du Festival" and the Rhythm and Roots series, which pairs local and international artists into a live collaborative performance at the Blue Moon Saloon.

Headlining musicians at Festival International will include Alpha Blondy

and the Solar System; A-WA; Burundi Drummers; Dédé Saint Prix; The Garifuna Collective; Sonny Landreth and dozens more. ◀



For more information, visit festivalinternational.org.



SHOW SUPPORT

One way that Festival International maintains its free admission is through the optional sale of collector's items, namely, the official pin and poster. This year, the official artwork was done by mixed media artist and illustrator, Denise Gallagher.

"She has a style that's whimsical with a vintage flair," says April Courville, marketing director for Festival International, adding that the design is both "very modern and forward-thinking as well."