

## Overview of The Great British Rock & Blues Festival at Butlins, Skegness - January 2020



The weather was kind and the stages were set for yet another Great British Rock & Blues Festival in the Butlins resort at Skegness, Lincolnshire.

### Friday

There is always a certain 'buzz' on a Friday afternoon in the Skyline Pavilion, where the Introducing Stage is located and today was no exception. The highlights for me were **'Will Wilde'**, who opened the festival with a harmonica driven blues rock performance, exuding a great deal of excited energy which certainly rubbed off on the audience. Also, the more traditional end of the blues spectrum with **'Redfish'**, the Cumbrian based masters of their art, with rhythm & blues at its best. One of the tightest bands I've seen with the added interest of the eccentric but brilliant keyboard player. A great sound and a great performance.



**Will Wilde**



**Redfish**

As the evening approached, it was time to hit the main stages. First for me was **'Johnnie 'Guitar' Williamson & Blue Swamp'** in Centre Stage, or the Blues Stage. No stranger to the festival, Johnnie has played as Blue Swamp previously, in a different form. A good opener for the evening



**Johnnie 'Guitar' Williamson & Blue Swamp**

One of my favourite bands **'Catfish'**, were playing on the new Blues Matters Stage in Hotshots. I had mixed feelings about the venue, which is the bowling alley and it proved just not big enough to accommodate the large number of Catfish fans. I did finally manage to get in for the last few numbers and Catfish did not disappoint. Matt Long, fronting the band on guitar and vocals, is certainly in a class of his own and they were one of the main highlights of the festival for me. Perhaps a main stage slot next year?



**Catfish**

The final band of the night for me, were the blast from the past **'Savoy Brown'** in Reds or the Rock Stage. It was good to see founder member Kim Simmons still strutting his stuff and giving such a high-class performance with his excellent band.



**Savoy Brown**

### **Saturday**

An incredibly refreshing start to the day on the Rock Stage with the young and immensely talented **'Andy Taylor Group'**, all the way from the Orkneys. They are certainly one of the emerging bands that needs to be taken seriously. Their blues rock style has a flavour of Rory Gallagher and front man Andy Taylor on guitar and vocals and took command of the stage. Certainly, a power trio that have an edge, do watch out for these guys.



**Andy Taylor Group**

They were followed by the acclaimed **'Starlite Campbell Band'**, from the Isle of Man. A well put together tight performance with husband and wife team on guitar and bass and guest Jamie Pipe on keys.



**Starlite Campbell Band**

For the evening session I hit the Rock Stage for **'Rhino's Revenge'** and was not disappointed. A performance of pre-punk inspired music with a great deal of humour infused into the set, with ex Status Quo bass player John 'Rhino' Edwards fronting the band on bass and lead vocals. He was joined by Jim Kirkpatrick on superb guitar and vocals creating a high energy cabaret, with a great deal of fun and laughter.



**Rhino's Revenge**

A move to the Blues Stage for a master blues session with **'Paul Lamb & The King Snakes'**. Harmonica drenched classic rhythm and blues.



**Paul Lamb & The King Snakes**

Back on the Rock Stage, another blast from the past '**Atomic Rooster**'. The band featured original members Steve Bolton on guitar and Pete French on vocals. They were joined by Adrian Gautrey on organ, Bo Walsh on drums and Shug Millidge on bass. The set included a back catalogue, bringing a return of prog rock at its best.



**Atomic Rooster**

### **Sunday**

Opening on the Rock Stage were the definitely not to be missed '**Crow Black Chicken**'. They were one of the deserved winners from the Introducing Stage last year. From County Cork in Ireland, these guys pumped out raw heavy-duty Southern Rock. Fronting the band on guitar and growling vocals was Christy O'Hanlon with Steven McGrath on bass and Gev Barrett on drums. A superb performance which was incredibly well supported considering it was midday on a Sunday!



**Crow Black Chicken**

A brief taster of **'Sam Kelly's Station House'** on the Blues Stage with their take on blues and soul. Then back to the Rock Stage for **'Zoe Schwarz Blues Commotion'**, a rootsy blues performance with commanding velvet vocals from Zoe.



**Sam Kelly's Station House**



**Zoe Schwarz Blues Commotion**

Onto the Blues Stage for **'Ma Bessie and Her Blues Troupe'** as a tribute to Bessie Smith. A Totally professional performance of the best of the 'old blues'. Staying in the Blues Stage I caught **'Mud Morganfield'**, son of Muddy Waters. He played some of the classics from the past and was well supported by his British band.



**Ma Bessie and Her Blues Troupe**



**Mud Morganfield**

I paid a visit to The Blues Matters Stage for the acoustic afternoon but sadly missed **'Trevor 'Babajack' Steger'**, the harmonica and cigar box guitar man, but I did manage a catch up in the bar later. I have seen Trevor many times before and he always puts on a cracking performance. I caught some of **'Roland Jones's** set and **'When Rivers Meet'** so a pleasant way to end the afternoon.



**When Rivers Meet**

The final evening kicked off to a packed house in the Blues Stage with **'Climax Blues Band'**. What an excellent band with their distinctive funky soul blues. Showcasing their current album 'Hands of Time' they really set a standard. With long time members George Glover on keys, Lester Hunt on guitar, Neil Simpson on bass and Roy Adams on drums and newer members Chris Aldridge on sax and the superb Graham Dee on vocals, they continue to move forward. Their show was one on my highlights of the festival and certainly raised the roof of the packed auditorium of a few thousand people.



**Climax Blues Band**

With many folk flagging after such a full on weekend, I headed to the Blues Matters Stage for the final bands for me, of the festival. **'The Chris Bevington Organisation'** are a firm favourite of mine as a collective of top-class musicians. As a nine piece they have that 'big band' sound and gave a brilliant performance of blues, rock, soul and funk to a packed house, showcasing tracks from their forthcoming album and some of the firm favourites from previous albums. Another highlight of the festival for me!



**The Chris Bevington Organisation**

The closing band of the festival on the Blues Matters Stage, were the fresh and entertaining **'Achievers'**. Every time I see them, they just get better and better. Their distinctive style of blues and gospel leaning towards Americana is infectious. It is so good to see a band break out of the static mould that is all too prevalent on the blues scene today. With fantastic four-part harmonies, superb musicianship from the whole band, they totally work as one. They are definitely a band you must see live. They were chosen to represent the UK in the International and the European Blues Challenges and are certainly a band that are at the forefront of the changing face of British blues. Another highlight of the festival for me!



### **Achievers**

There was so much that I missed, but you can get the flavour of this iconic event. Butlins were already taking bookings for next year so that perhaps says it all!

**Rosy Greer – Lancashire Blues Archive and Independent Reviewer**