

Don't miss this big block party

HINT OF NASHVILLE: Festival boss aims to outpace Winnipeg for attendance



John P. McLaughlin
COUNTRY/ROOTS

I remember one June years ago flying down to Nashville and attending the Country Music Association's premier gathering of country fans and artists, the International Country Music Fan Fair or, more colloquially, Fan Fair.

It was held in those days at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds in a building very similar to the one where you buy mops and peanut brittle at the PNE. People of every shape — frequently rotund — would line up at booths and shake hands, chat with and get autographs from their favourite artist.

It was strangely innocent. Dolly Parton being photographed here, Kathy Mattea signing there and everybody jostling. I recall looking up at one point and there was old Porter Wagoner heading for the washroom. Fast. Speaking of which — that was the year Garth Brooks signed for 23 hours straight without food, sleep or a bathroom break.

Fan Fair is nothing like that any more and nor has our own version, the Canadian Country Music Association's FanFest, ever been. For one thing, no Porter

Special event

CCMA FanFest

Where: 700 block of Granville between Georgia and Robson streets

When: Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Tickets: Free

street party, all along the 700 block of Granville.

But Angela Harris, the FanFest co-ordinator, nevertheless wants to retain some of that down-home, hands-on vibe I remembered from Nashville. Of course, there will be security at the event but she's refrained from putting in almost any fencing, going for an open atmosphere. A longtime event co-ordinator who has taught at Capilano University, Harris is also a singer-songwriter who got into staging events to promote her own career so she sees these things from both the organizer's and artist's point of view, a real asset.

FanFest has been a regular part of Country Music Week since 1999 and the largest attendance thus far was at last year's event in Winnipeg when 8,000 turned out. But we could well outpace that figure not least because our site just recently became one of the most accessible parts of the city.

"That 700 block of Granville has changed significantly through the construction of the Canada Line," says Harris. "In the first part of spring, when it was decided that was where this event was going to happen, it was two lanes and typical street sidewalks. Then as I



Jessie Farrell is one of 16 artists performing in the 700 block of Granville — the main outdoor location for FanFest. GERRY KAHRMANN — THE PROVINCE

into about five different site plans because with the construction there was a re-shaping of the site. The site now is one lane and these really wide sidewalks. And the city decided that will be THE outdoor location for events in Vancouver and FanFest is the first event there. And the Canada Line runs right to the 700 block."

Hosted by JRM's Clay St. Thomas and Karen Daniels plus CMT's Paul McGuire, this goes for four hours starting at 11 on Saturday and features 16 artists

Aaron Pritchett, the Higgins, Carolyn Dawn Johnson, Ridley Bent and lots more.

Harris assures me she couldn't have pulled this off without the help of the host committee, the CCMA staff and, especially, her 20-plus volunteers. And while the sponsors like HMV, CMT, JRM and Tim Hortons will be actively on site she neither confirmed nor denied whether there would be free Timbits all around. She just laughed. Timbits are no laughing matter.

CCMAS

CCMA Songwriter's Cafe

Songwriters share the stage in an acoustic, in-the-round setting. • Fairmont Hotel, 900 W. Georgia St. • Sept. 10-12 • 604-684-3131, www.ccma.org

New Artist Showcase

Eight young Canadian country artists perform. • Fairmont Hotel, 900 W. Georgia St. • Sept. 10, 10-11:30 p.m. • 604-684-3131, www.ccma.org

CCMA: FanFest

16 performers over the course of four hours, celebrating this year's Canadian Country Music Awards. • 700 Granville St. (between Robson and Georgia) • Sept. 12, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. • Free, www.ccma.org

Canadian Country Music Awards Showcase

Venue, 881 Granville St. • Sept. 12 • Tickets at the door • www.ccma.org

Great Guitar Pull

Lets listeners in on the stories behind some of country's chart-toppers • Fairmont Hotel, 900 W. Georgia St. • Sept. 13, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. • www.ccma.org

CCMA Gospel Showcase

A celebration of some of the most compelling artists of the format. • 10th Avenue Alliance Church, 11 W. 10th Ave. • Sept. 13, 1:30-3 p.m. • www.ccma.org

CCMA Awards

Performers include Terri Clark, Doc Walker and Johnny Reid. • GM Place • Sept. 13 • 520-