

Arts

June 9, 2005

Best of the Fest

CMA Music Festival offers plenty of highlights over four days

Thursday, 9th

COUNTRY KICKSTART Jamie O'Neal has been performing since age 9, and it shows—onstage, she projects personality to the back rows. She also has a way with a hook, as heard on her fine sophomore album, *Brave*. Down the bill, it'll be interesting to see how relatively quirky Ryan Shupe & the Rubber Band, whose "Dream Big" is getting attention on country radio, blends with the more mainstream acts. With Montgomery Gentry, Jessica Andrews and newcomers Keith Anderson and Brice Long. *10 a.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Chris Neal

THE MEGA MUSIC SHOW A solid candidate for the Country Music Hall of Fame, Mel Tillis doesn't get to Nashville nearly often enough. A smooth singer who began writing hits in the '50s and dominated the charts as a performer in the '70s, he's still an engaging entertainer with a friendly, humorous show. His daughter Pam did some hit-making of her own in the '90s, combining a modern sensibility that encompasses everything from her dad's classics to rock and even Broadway favorites with intelligent songwriting and a

distinctive voice. Chely Wright used her departure from MCA to dig deeper within herself, producing a new album, *Metropolitan Hotel*, which features some of her best, most autobiographical songwriting and her stunning soprano. With Ty Herndon, Little Big Town and Danni O'Neill. *Noon, Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Jon Weisberger

COMPLETE COUNTRY SHOW "Complete country" is right—this is one of the widest-ranging bills at this year's festival, headed up by MuzikMafia rapper Cowboy Troy, who's gotten all the buzz of a swarm of angry hornets. At the other end of the spectrum is Melonie Cannon, whose graceful, melancholy Skaggs Family Records debut is rich with contemporary bluegrass and acoustic country.

Somewhere in between is neo-honky-tonker Trent Willmon, who overcomes his vocal limitations and the generic production of his self-titled debut with some well-crafted and meaty songs. With Glenn Cummings, Hanna McEuen, Little Texas and Restless Heart. *2 p.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Jon Weisberger

NASHVILLE SPOTLIGHT SHOW Shelly Fairchild's lusty new single, "Kiss Me," pegs her as one of 2005's most promising new country artists, and her solid debut album delivers several more performances that are just as good. The young Mississippian knows how to work a stage, and she'll challenge veterans like the Bellamy Brothers, Neal McCoy and Steve Holy to step up and show their best stuff. *4 p.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Michael McCall

CHEVY ALL ACCESS STAGE Lane Turner delivers cleverly written

dance-floor honky-tonk with a winking kick. He'll follow the eclectic newcomers Ryan Shupe & the Rubberband, who bring a down-home funk to country music. *6 p.m., Sports Zone at foot of Shelby Street Bridge* —Michael McCall

CMA MUSIC FESTIVAL NIGHTLY CONCERT The Festival's big-ticket shows get off to a sizzling start with a strong lineup that's heavy with new twists on tradition. Lee Ann Womack's latest album takes an uncompromising yet subtle neo-traditionalist tack, re-creating the feel of '70s country with a charming warmth and sly sophistication, and Dierks Bentley's new *Modern Day Drifter* is an exercise in muscular roadhouse country, ranging from honky-tonk weepers to Waylon-flavored chuggers and good-timin' raveups. Hall of Famer Dolly Parton recaps her recent triumphant tours by reuniting with hot new bluegrass band The Grascals. Julie Roberts rounds out the neo-traditional slant by offering a simmering glimpse of the crossroads where country and southern R&B meet, while Keith Urban charts newer territory by alternating feisty country-rockers that showcase his guitar pyrotechnics with "sensitive guy" ballads that occasionally reach deep. With LeAnn Rimes, Sugarland and Phil Vassar. *8 p.m., Coliseum* —Jon Weisberger

Happening in the clubs

B.B. KING'S BLUES CLUB John England & the Western Swingers play jazzed-up Western swing perfect for spinning around the dance floor. The veterans of Lower Broad feature well-traveled musicians whose skill is as apparent as their love for ageless tunes by Bob Wills, Ernest Tubb and Ray Price. *8 p.m.* —Michael McCall

STATION INN Named for Bill Monroe's horse, King Wilkie are six young Virginians dedicated to traditional bluegrass who capture the music's tightly wound passion while leaving room for youthful exuberance and growth. *9 p.m.* —Michael McCall

FAMILY WASH Paul Burch brings a troubadour's soul and an artful angle to honky-tonk, swing, acoustic blues—indeed, to all variety of American roots music—and delivers it in front of an outstanding band, the WPA Ballclub, who emphasize tasteful notes and loose-jointed rhythms. *9 p.m.* —Michael McCall

Friday, 10th

BOOT SCOOTIN' BRUNCH Friday's Riverfront festivities begin with this flurry of recent Nashville signings, plus sturdy veteran Aaron Tippin. There is a *real* veteran in this mix, actually: talented up-and-comer Keni Thomas was an Army Ranger who fought in the famous "Black Hawk Down" battle. With Jessi Alexander, Amy Dalley, Hilljack, Jon Randall and *American Idol* finalist Carmen Rasmusen. *10 a.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Chris Neal

NASHVILLE STANDARD TIME Call this one the cavalcade of youngsters. Rebecca Lynn Howard is a big-voiced Kentucky native whose skillful songwriting and intense vocal style have kept her busy—she already has three albums under her belt—even though she has yet to consistently reach the charts. Bobby Pinson is a singer with a throat full of gravel whose debut album has turned critics' heads with its detailed slice-of-life portraits, while his first single, "Don't Ask Me How I Know," recently crept into the Top 20.

Malibu Storm's siblings are young, but already had plenty of experience and chops when they created the pop-bluegrass blends that make up their self-titled debut. The slightly older Wrights offer a refreshingly spare take on neo-traditional country on their initial effort, *Down This Road*. With Blaine Larsen and Lila McCann. 2 p.m., *Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Jon Weisberger

HOOKED ON MUSIC The best reason to catch this mix-and-match bill is Carolyn Dawn Johnson, as sharp and as underrated a singer-songwriter as Music Row has produced in the last few years. But don't miss David Ball, on a hot streak since going indie with 2001's terrific *Amigo*. With Mark Wills, Linda Davis, Steve Azar, Aaron Lines and newcomer Amber Dotson. Noon, *Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Chris Neal

HEARTLAND HAPPENIN' No, Billy Ray Cyrus doesn't have a mullet these days. And no, he isn't on that PAX show anymore. More importantly, his brawny country-rock proves a surprisingly appealing fit for the gospel message of his latest album, *The Other Side*. With Emerson Drive, Eric Heatherly, Jeffrey Steele, Jill King, Wayne Warner and Brittany Wells. 4 p.m., *Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Chris Neal

CMA MUSIC FESTIVAL NIGHTLY CONCERT Some of country's strongest voices are on display here, together with one of its classiest acts in thoughtful neo-traditionalist Alan Jackson. Sara Evans' rich contralto is equally effective whether she's tackling a Harlan Howard classic or a glossy pop-rock-country blend, while Travis Tritt handles everything from gritty Southern rock to

contemplative ballads and even bluegrass without a hitch. Blake Shelton doesn't have the experiential depth of Evans or Tritt yet, but like them, his wide vocal range and mastery of dynamics give him a broad interpretive palette that's put to good use on his latest album. With Josh Gracin, Craig Morgan, Rascal Flatts and SHeDAISY. *8 p.m., Coliseum* —Jon Weisberger

Happening in the clubs

STATION INN For a musical palate cleanser and some of the best, most lonesome-sounding bluegrass you'll ever hear, catch one of Blueridge's all too infrequent Nashville shows. The Virginia-North Carolina quintet pay a price for their lack of gimmickry and press-friendly backstories, but offer up a great combination of mountain-flavored vocals with plenty of instrumental fire and drive. *9 p.m.* —Jon Weisberger

FAMILY WASH Joy Lynn White romps with a wide-open voice and salt-of-the-earth emotion through rootsy country rock and soul. Her '90s albums remain sought-after cult classics for the way they predicted the spirited boom of such like-minded spirits as the Dixie Chicks and Gretchen Wilson. She's joined by the gruff, expressive singer-songwriter Arthur Godfrey. *9 p.m.* —Michael McCall

EXIT/IN Now living in California and recording for a California record label, Deana Carter returns to Nashville having proven a major point: she makes better records when she's in charge. Her new *The Story of My Life* is both her first original album made entirely outside the Music City system, and her best work in a decade. Fan club members get in free. *9 p.m.* —Chris Neal

Saturday, 11th

COUNTRY JAMBOREE SHOW The first and the current winners of *Nashville Star* (Buddy Jewell and Erika Jo, respectively) anchor this show, but the real stars here are The Grascals. Propelled onto center stage by their high-profile gig opening for and backing Dolly Parton on her last tour, the bluegrass sextet are keeping their place with a savvy, heartfelt take on a Nashville tradition. Lead singer Terry Eldredge is a longtime Nashville favorite who can croon a George Jones ballad as easily as he can belt out a Jimmy Martin hair-raiser, and the rest of the band stay right with him wherever he goes. With John Berry, Jace Everett, Brian McComas and Michelle Wright. *10 a.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Jon Weisberger

SATURDAY IN THE PARK She's still better known for her scantily clad appearance earlier this year on *FHM* magazine's mildly notorious "Country Music's Sexy Stars" cover, but Lauren Lucas' upcoming debut album is a soulful (and, yes, sexy) surprise. With Jimmy Wayne, Bryan White, Hot Apple Pie and Derryl Perry. *Noon, Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Chris Neal

NAMMIE EXPERIENCE SHOW Nashville is much more than just country music, as proven by this program featuring the celebrated pop-rocker Bill Lloyd (one-half of the '80s country-rock duo Foster & Lloyd), rising folk-roots artist Julie Lee, '60s soul great Bobby Hebb and the renowned blues and R&B legends Earl Gaines and Johnny Jones, the latter of whom taught Jimi Hendrix how to rock the house. *5 p.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Michael McCall

CONCERT AT THE COLISEUM All eyes will be on Trisha Yearwood at Saturday's stadium show. The buzz is good on *Jasper County*, her first album in four years, and positively deafening on her engagement to Garth Brooks a couple of weeks ago. But do save some attention for Miranda Lambert, whose gutsy *Kerosene* is one of the year's most promising debuts. With Trace Adkins, Jo Dee Messina, Wynonna, Kenny Rogers and Joe Nichols. 8 p.m., Coliseum —Chris Neal

Happening in the clubs

EXIT/IN An incisive, thoughtful songwriter with a sweet yet powerful voice, Gail Davies has yet to get her due from country music historians as a successful early-'80s neo-traditionalist—though she is widely heralded as the first female producer in country music. A humorously acerbic critic of business-as-usual on the Row, she can also write with a deep, lyrical sentimentality about her family and childhood experiences, making her shows a multifaceted example of country's classic values and themes. 9 p.m. —Jon Weisberger

Sunday, 12th

SUNDAY MORNIN' COUNTRY HOSTED BY BRENDA LEE The Ryman offers a multitude of country and gospel artists on the festival's final day, and there are some don't-misses scattered through the list. Start with Jean Shepard, a pioneering women who can still belt out her classics with an unrepentant twang and abundant spirit, or Connie Smith, whose easygoing yet regal presence renders her rich, soaring voice all the more effective. As a bonus, keep an eye out for

stunning Dobro player and singer Randy Kohrs, who's as comfortable singing country as he is picking bluegrass. With Jim Ed Brown, Margo Smith, Stella Parton and others. *2:30 p.m., Ryman Auditorium* —Jon Weisberger

TOTALLY COUNTRY SHOW Grand Ole Opry veterans will toast the morning with classic countrypolitan sounds. Bill Anderson and Jim Ed Brown were Nashville Sound pioneers who perform with the flair of veterans who love what they do. They'll be joined by Lorrie Morgan, Eddy Raven and David Frizzell, three well-traveled crowd pleasers. *10:30 a.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Michael McCall

SUNDAY IN THE SOUTH An old-fashioned variety show that smartly pairs classic veterans like the inimitable Connie Smith and cool-rockin' David Lee Murphy with spirited honky-tonker Elizabeth Cook and stomping country-rocker Jason Aldean. With Mel McDaniel, Joe Diffie, Michael Peterson and new duo Fanny Grace. *1:40 p.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages, Riverfront Park* —Michael McCall

RIVERFRONT GRAND FINALE CMA downtown finishes off with a grand sweep of Nashville old and new. Fist-pumping entertainers the Oak Ridge Boys will be joined by Christian music's The Crabb Family and a glimpse of the Pajama Party Tour featuring the Delta country soul of Deborah, the torchy voice of Tammy Cochran and guitar-slinging singer Anita Cochran. *3:30 p.m., Greased Lightning Daytime Stages* —Michael McCall

CMA FESTIVAL NIGHTLY CONCERT Last year's CMA fest saw the arrival of Gretchen Wilson as a major force, only weeks after her

blockbuster debut album turned the city on its ear. (Her "Here for the Party" video was filmed during her 2004 festival performance.) This year she returns as an established heavyweight to send this mother out with a bang alongside MuzikMafia comrades Big & Rich, who know a thing or two about big finishes. With Jeff Bates, Diamond Rio, Andy Griggs, Sawyer Brown and singer Johnny Van Zant doing double duty in Southern-rock stalwarts Lynyrd Skynyrd and new country duo Van Zant. *8 p.m., Coliseum* —Chris Neal

All contents © 1995-2005 City Press Publishing, Inc., 2120 8th Ave. S., Nashville, TN 37204. (615) 244-7989.
All rights reserved. No part of this service may be reproduced in any form without the express written permission of City Press Publishing, Inc. except that an individual may download and/or forward articles via email to a reasonable number of recipients for personal, non-commercial purposes.

NASHVILLE SCENE: [Home](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Jobs @ the Scene](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)
OUR SISTER PAPERS: [City Pages](#) | [LA Weekly](#) | [OC Weekly](#) | [Seattle Weekly](#) | [Village Voice](#)