

THE BIG TIME OUT

BY DAVID MORRISON

Avigdor Schulman is a very busy man. He was busy before I contacted him and swamped when I did. His working life will remain hectic, increasing in tempo, right up to and through the third weekend of August. After that, he may be able to draw breath and kick back awhile – but not for long, because in September it will start over again.

Since September of last year, you see, Schulman and his colleagues have been all wrapped up in organising *The Big Time Out 2008*, Cumberland Village Works' spectacular offering to the Vancouver Island festival season. A programmer of entertainment at various Comox Valley venues, Schulman is also The Big Time Out's Artistic Director. As I can emphatically attest, such a role is one hell of a brief. Back in England I helped organize three all-day events, featuring ten local bands each time, nearly driving myself loopy in the process. But my experiences are trivial in comparison with the intensity of detail Schulman has to cope with, dealing not only with the sounds for the festival, but also the look.

"I work with artists in all the disciplines participating," he says, "and help to set up collaborations between the dancers, musicians, visual artists and installers, to enhance an integrated environment borrowing as much from theatre and circus as from rock concerts and rave." If you've attended the previous Big Time Out's or seen photographs of last year's amazing festival site, you will appreciate exactly what Schulman means by this. Although he prefers it to be thought of as a "three day concert" in respect of the single live performance stage, in terms of visual presentation there's no event like it anywhere on the Island.

The Big Time Out 2008 promises to be extraordinary. I have to admit to emitting a little gasp when Schulman revealed the first few acts confirmed to play, especially in the case of New York hip-hoppers De La Soul. Once termed "The Sgt. Pepper of hip-hop" by *The Village Voice* magazine, their 1989 debut *3 Feet High and Rising* is an acknowledged masterpiece and seminal release of the genre. Also scheduled are Emily Haines' unfeasibly cool new wave



De La Soul



Jorane



Metric

Sharon MacDonnell photos

popsters Metric; the suitably monikered, British dub reggae pioneer, Mad Professor; Quebec's bewitching cellist/vocalist Jorane and roots-rockers Wil from Calgary. There are many more set to be unveiled as I write, but a personal recommendation I'd deem unmissable is Vancouverite Be Good Tanyas collaborator C.R. Avery. Various described as "Neil Young if he was influenced by hip-hop" or, preciously, "a one-man hip-hop beatbox blues harmonica Americana iconoclast," he is brilliant and performs here with his band.

As if these names alone are not enticing enough, there will be more going on this year than ever before. "We have some surprises, for sure!" Schulman excitedly proclaims. "We'll have a second 'chill zone,' and as well as 'Union Saloon' – our ridiculously popular themed bar – there'll be a 'chai' tent offering downtempo entertainment, non-alcoholic bebies and treats. Both areas will be covered and creating their own environments for an alternate focus from the main stage."

Although the majority of those attending this year's event will surely be present for the duration, one appealing facet of the festival is that considerate programming means fans of certain genres can pick their day to attend if they'd rather not do the whole shebang. This year, therefore, sees indie and alternative rock on Friday; reggae, dub and dancehall on Saturday; and hip-hop, bhangra and Middle-Eastern fusion to close proceedings on Sunday. In my

opinion, this is always the best way to do things. There is little more frustrating in a festival environment than having to endure hours of stuff off your radar, as you wait for the act or kind of sound that you came for. I've certainly been there, grinding out such as the hideous girlypop of Atomic Kitten and an excruciating solo set from the Spice Girls' Mel B when desperate to see just R.E.M. at South Africa Freedom Day in London eight Aprils ago. So, good work, Mr. Schulman.

In closing before returning to the bombardment of emails and phone calls he's facing, Schulman said: "Energetically", the theme of this year's show is 'mitzvah,' which has come to mean any act of human kindness." What a lovely sentiment, I thought, realizing the greatest mitzvah I could pay Schulman right then was to leave him in peace so he could get on with his work!

The Big Time Out 2008 takes place in Cumberland on August 15 through 17. Information on ticketing and the full line-up can be found at the Cumberland Village Works website: www.cumberlandvillageworks.com/big-time-out ~

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