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West Virginia's All Good festival is jam-band heaven

Event is laid-back and family-friendly

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MASONTOWN, W.Va. -- It was shortly before midnight July 11 when the candle-powered paper balloon drifted up into the cool mountain air over a sea of glow sticks, swirling dresses and happy fans dancing to Phil Lesh of the Grateful Dead.

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By the time we said goodbye the evening of July 13 to new friends at the All Good Festival on Marvin's Mountaintop, we'd soaked up three days of jam-band heaven with a music lineup of dozens of bands that ran from Railroad Earth and Widespread Panic to Michael Franti & Spearhead.

And it all happened amid 55 gorgeous acres of rolling hills and forest overlooking the Allegheny Mountains.

While the something-for-everyone music festivals, such as 80,000-fan Bonnaroo in [Manchester](#), Tenn., now dominate the

summer music scene, jam-band purists increasingly put off by the crowds and growing role of indie bands and acts such as Metallica are peeling off to smaller festivals to reconnect with their hippie vibe.

One of the best is the All Good Music Festival and Campout, which, since 2003, has been held on a mountain in West Virginia that was reclaimed from a strip mine.

Rolling Stone magazine named the event, which started in Maryland, one of the best outdoor summer festivals last year, while Relix magazine called it "the jam-friendliest fest around."

And it was easy to see why.

More than 17,000 fans showed up to brave the hot days and cool nights, but the lines were small, the camping roomy, the views stellar, the people friendly and music cohesive and consistently good.

Festival-goers sipped Magic Hat microbrews from Vermont, made short trips to burrito and falafel vendors set up near stalls selling handicrafts and T-shirts, and marveled at the fine lineup of jam music, funk, Americana and soul-infused acts.

Without the overlapping sets that force difficult choices and complicated planning at big venues such as Bonnaroo, All Good had only three stages with only one band playing at any one time. And rather than hiking for miles, fans in the natural amphitheater only had to turn 45 degrees to see the



Photos by Geoff Oliver Bugbee, Special to The C-J
Chas Surran of New Jersey held his 7-month-old son, Cosmo, at the All Good Music Festival during an early-evening performance.



The All Good Music Festival drew more than 17,000 fans to Masontown, W. Va., July 11-13. Since 2003 the festival and camp-out has been held on a mountain reclaimed from a strip mine.



Lindsay Kiehl had her body painted at this year's All Good Music Festival.

second main stage.

Acts included the Brazilian Girls, The Avett Brothers, Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, Keller Williams, Medeski Scofield Martin and Wood, Derek Trucks & Susan Tedeschi Soul Stew Revival, Mike Gordon, the Wood Brothers, JJ Grey & Mofro and Dark Star Orchestra, which played until 4 a.m. July 12.

Between main acts, bands and DJs, such as San Francisco's Bassnectar, took a smaller stage.

July 11's headliner, Phil Lesh & Friends, thrilled the crowd with Dead songs that included "Brokedown Palace," "Loser," "Ripple" and "Jack Straw." Other highlights included Railroad Earth's string-oriented jams in front of hula-hooping fans and families pulling children in wagons, and Michael Franti's politically conscious music tinged with reggae, rock and hip-hop.

A third stage higher up on the hill hosted a series of surprise and experimental performances throughout the festival, including jam that included guitarist John Scofield and members of Medeski Martin and Wood. At one point, a cordless microphone was passed into the audience for a spontaneous question-and-answer session with the musicians.

While the party raged late in some parts, and on Saturday night included a long fireworks display, the festival was also surprisingly family-friendly, with shaggy-haired children enjoying the music and making friends in family camping areas, which were fenced, and a kids' activity area near the music.

The festival drew a wide range of ages and fans wearing everything from honeybee costumes to fraying tie-dyes, from college kids to parents happy to be passing the come-as-you-are outdoor-hippie-music vibe on to their children.

And as die-hard fans were pulling out on the final evening, many were making plans to return next year.

Reporter Chris Kenning can be reached at (502) 582-4697.



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