

LEAF 2003: A Celebration of Our Cultural Diversity

The 17th edition of LEAF will soon be upon us once again October 17-19 held as always at Camp Rockmont in the quaint little community of Black Mountain, nicknamed the “front porch of Western North Carolina,” due to its geographical positioning on the eastern edge of the Appalachian Range. This beautiful serene setting will be the backdrop for what is rapidly becoming one of the greatest traditional festivals of a smaller scale not only in the southeast, but in the entire US as well. Why has the Lake Eden Arts Festival grown so popular with each passing year and drawn back so many repeat visitors to this bucolic landscape?

The answer is that LEAF appeals to a broad range of tastes: One need only look around them at any time to recognize the obvious fact that there is no age limit, no particular personality type, no race, ethnicity, or gender that is not represented and catered to at LEAF. The young and old from all areas and backgrounds of life enjoy it alike. Grandparents, parents, and their kids will all find something fun to whet their appetite for amusement.

The children can participate in all sorts of exciting activities, including kids music, games, puppet shows, storytelling, arts and crafts, and possibly swimming if the weather permits amidst the uncertain fluctuation of October temperatures.

The grandparents, parents, and young adults will no doubt appreciate the abundance of quality music that performs at LEAF, encompassing every genre from Bluegrass to African Dance to Reggae to Salsa to Jazz, and so on, just to name a few. I had a chance to witness bands of these numerous styles at this past LEAF and they had me entranced. The line-ups they book at LEAF are truly nothing short of extraordinary, as you have to see it to believe it, and I personally am still reeling from the African dance jam band I saw that incorporated modern bass and guitar with traditional African woodwind instruments to create a uniquely exceptional sound.

There is plenty else going on at LEAF as well, and everyone in the family might desire to do a little dancing with all this music stirring their feet into motion. Thus, there will be contra dancing all weekend long led by fantastic bands to keep you active right into the evening. Perhaps if anyone is tired or stressed out, they may just want to check out one of the myriad healing arts sessions, where professional yoga teachers teach free classes to LEAF-goers on site. These body and mind specialists teach through exercises designed to relieve tension and calm one’s nerves. I tried it myself for the first time when I was at LEAF in May, and I definitely walked away feeling more relaxed and rejuvenated.

Another engrossing spectacle occurring during every LEAF is the always incredible, unpredictable, and highly underrated Poetry Slam. I went to the Poetry Slam finals this past May, catching most of the last round after viewing a spectacular fire magic show taking place on the lake’s beach. It really blew me away to see the wealth of talent that walked up to the stage on this night. I couldn’t believe I even contemplated participating in the slam earlier on in the day. Let me tell you I would have been no match for these wordsmiths, and I majored in Literature in college and have had my poetry published on more than one occasion. Some of the contestants were so forceful and compelling that they literally had me hanging on their every word. The majority

even received standing ovations for their impressive improv presentations. Do yourself a favor and don't miss the Poetry Slam competition, and you'll thank me later.

Naturally, just as LEAF has a variety of entertainment, they also have an array of delicious foods at reasonable prices. There are all kinds of dishes for even the most discriminating palate, so finding a meal for the whole family won't be a problem with so many culinary options.

One can also leave the responsibility of their sustenance up to themselves if they wish, since another magnificent aspect of LEAF is the convenience of being able to camp out right on the property of the festival. This is very helpful and cost efficient to the flock of people coming from out of town that want to spend one or multiple nights in Black Mountain for LEAF. What would better suit you than waking up in your tent, cooking breakfast, and walking 200 yards to watch the opening band for the day?

LEAF is certainly something special, because it brings people from all walks of life together to share a common appreciation for what makes our country so unique. In America, we are a melting pot, and LEAF is a celebration of our diversity, and its continuing success is testament to the progress our nation has made in embracing this motley mix of cultures, ages, ethnicities, and religions, through our universal love of music, art, and dance.