

TentStateMusicFestivalToEndTheWar2008ColiseumDenverTextTVS

Tent State Music Festival to End the War, Coliseum, Denver, August 27, 2008.

By Tim Van Schmidt

There wasn't much that was peaceful at the Tent State Music Festival to End the War at the Denver Coliseum yesterday. Rage Against the Machine headed up a four-band bill that also included fast-rising Denver band the Flobots, the Coup from Oakland and State Radio from Boston, and this band's music is anything but peaceful. Fitful, intense, powerfully on the edge, Rage Against the Machine's music is about as peaceful as a pair of white-knuckled fists in the air. The other bands were just about as hard and direct.

This event wasn't about peace particularly. It was about ending the war in Iraq. Those seem to be too separate things- first one, then the other. So the harsh power of the music- hard rock, funk and hip hop hammered together into a clattering musical sheet metal- seemed appropriate for the cause at hand.

The cause was something bigger than rockers shouting on the stage. The free concert was designed to be a prelude to a four-mile march from the Coliseum to the site of the Democratic National Convention being held at the Pepsi Center in the downtown Denver area. The action was being organized and lead by the Iraq Veterans Against the War- who headed up the march, many in full uniform.

In keeping an eye on the bigger reason for the gathering, the Music Festival to End the War featured various inspirational speakers between acts, including representatives of the IVAW, who read an "open letter" to Democratic candidate Barack Obama, outlining specific points of concern, as well as demonstrated to the crowd the tactics they had developed in case of arrest during the march, which was scheduled to start immediately after Rage Against the Machine set.

Other speakers included the longtime anti-war activist Ron Kovic and former Dead Kennedys' front man Jello Biafra. Biafra gave rapid fire facts about the skullduggery of elected officials and world organizations and encouraged the crowd not to give up on activism even if a seemingly favorable candidate such as Obama wins the election. He told the crowd to continue to "blowtorch up their ass the whole time they're in power."

A defining moment for the music festival portion of the day was when Wayne Kramer, of the MC5, joined Rage Against the Machine for a roiling version of "Kick Out the Jams." Kramer and his band played at the 1968 DNC. It showed that activism in rock and roll is a longstanding tradition. And it also showed that what rock and roll does is great- a good hard groove supported by snarling, chunky guitar and wailing vocals is hard to resist. It riles up a crowd every time. That's just what rock and roll does.

But on this day, the energy stirred up by the everything-but-peaceful rock and roll of the day was put to use. The Tent State Music festival to End the War was a special show indeed. But even

more special was the show put on by the activists who marched. Their message was much more powerful than those stacks of amplifiers on the stage.