



## The Writer from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

### Reporting & Features in the East Aurora Advertiser

#### “Borderland Music + Arts Knocks it Out of the Park”

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**T**he sun hadn't fully risen over the Knox Farm State Park stables on Monday, September 24, and already a crew of more than 50 was helping to fulfill the promise that organizers Jennifer Brazill and John Cimperman had made to “leave no trace” after their first Borderland Music + Art Festival. By ten o'clock, the two main stages had been struck and were being loaded onto trucks, the green fencing that had set off the festival's 10 acres from the remaining 600 of the park was coming down, and concession tents were being collapsed. And around the festival grounds, the miraculous Marina McCoy from Waste Free Earth and her crew were scouring the grounds for any bits of trash that would go into her compost and recycling containers that would ultimately divert 70% of the festival's waste away from a landfill. By sunset Monday, you would have been surprised to learn that on the previous Saturday and Sunday, several thousand revelers had gathered for two days of food, drink, art, craft and music by the likes of Fruition, John Oates, Sam Bush, Sister Sparrow & and the Dirty Birds, Dr. Dog, the Revivalists, culminating in dazzling, full moon sets by Margo Price and Oteil Burbridge and Friends.

For 1990 EAHS grad Jennifer Brazill, who has made a career of managing artists and organizing music festivals (Winter Wondergrass—Colorado and Nevada), Borderland was an opportunity to showcase her passion for music and for the community that music creates. She knew that while home might be the most gratifying place to showcase her talents, it could also be the most devastating place to fail. She was willing to take the risk, and by all accounts, it was worth it.

The reviews of the first Borderland have been overwhelming positive. *Advertiser* editor Adam Zaremski, writer Shelly Ferullo, photographer Marty Wangelin and I were there and saw it firsthand. We set up a booth on the grounds and spent a fruitful day listening to music, talking to the public about our newspaper, and inviting readers to try out our old school manual typewriters. Our quasi-scientific poll concluded that everyone was having a grand time. How could it be otherwise

when you combine the idyllic setting with spectacular sunshine, great music and happy people?

On Monday, I spoke with organizers Brazill and Cimperman, festival director Jon Dindas, logistical wizard Whitt Bell, McCoy, festival-goers, vendors, security staff, NY State Police and musicians, and they all seemed to understand that they had helped make a world-class event possible in a uniquely perfect setting in small town that a) loves a good party, b) is, within reason, up for something new, but c) is fiercely determined to maintain the essential characteristics of a neighborly small community.

Said Cimperman, “We hoped to show people about what a world-class, professionally run festival can be, and should be, and how it can fit in revered place like Knox Farm and a tight-knit community like East Aurora.”

Here’s how they did it: They hired a professional event company, Dindas’s G4D Productions, to run the show. He’s been at it a long time and has events like LOCKN and Global Citizens to his credit. He brought in 100 employees and subcontractors to construct, run, maintain and break down the site. Next, they booked national acts and hired some of the best local talent, as well, like Folkfaces, Pine Fever, Leroy Townes, Miller and the Other Sinners. Then they filled the grounds with 17 local, working artisans in media like wood, wool, jewelry, textile, photography, tie-dye, and gardening. To feed and water their guests, they engaged six local, craft breweries and local restaurants. They encouraged non-profit organizations like Waste Free Earth, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeepers, Boys and Girls Club of EA, NYS Parks, the Roycroft Campus Corporation, HeadCount.org (voter registration), and the WNY Sustainable Business Roundtable to set up tents and tables, sell merchandise and explain their missions to the public. Then they made sustainability the order of the day with all compostable and recyclable food and beverage containers (no Styrofoam anywhere), free water bottle filling stations to discourage single-use plastic bottles, solar-powered cell phone charging stations. They encouraged volunteers to pitch in with a festival ticket as their reward.

And, they involved families by engaging the kids with hands-on fun at a fully staffed Kid Zone. Says, organizer Cimperman, “Adults behave much better when there are kids present.” Speaking of behavior, the State Troopers we talked to said they had no incidents to report, and Chief Shane Krieger of the EAPD told director Dindas that they had no trouble either. “It’s like you weren’t even there,” the chief said.

Dindas summed up his experience this way: “I’ve run many first-time festivals, and I’ve never been as impressed by a site or especially by the welcome of a community. The police, the park staff, the local cycling contingent, the people I’ve met have been great to work with. I think I’m an honorary member of the Brazill family now. And the bands were blown away by the venue and are anxious to come back. East Aurora has a lot to be proud of.”

Jennifer Brazill will tell you that beyond the bands she hires, beyond the nuts and bolts of the location, beyond the logistics of parking, electrical generators, VIP tents, and a thousand details, what really matters is bringing the pieces of this enormous puzzle together to produce a “vibe.” Vibe is one of those abstract terms, emanating from Brian Wilson’s classic song “Good Vibrations,” and describing the dominant feeling of a person, group, place or event. The vibe she hoped to achieve at Borderland might recall Shakespeare’s line from *Twelfth Night*, “If music be the food of love, play on.” She would invite everyone to form a two-day community, to rock out to some great music, to enjoy the pastoral, historical settings and to eat, drink and be merry. But in return, each of us there would understand that we carried a responsibility to respect the venue, respect Mother Nature, embrace sustainability and leave no trace, except, perhaps, the vibe, which we were welcome to carry with us until next year’s Borderland. As Wilson sang, “Gotta keep those good vibrations a-happenin’ with us.”