

Master bluesman gets 'em jumping at Michigan Fest

Band gathers great musicians

By KEN GLICKMAN
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And the opening act for the Siegel-Schwall Band is none other than ... Corky Siegel?

Yes, as weird as it sounds, blues singer, harmonica and piano player Corky Siegel, performing solo, was the warm-up act for his own blues band.

It was probably a really neat way for the Michigan

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Festival to save some money, but it was also an opportunity for Lansing audiences to get a full dose of this master bluesman's skills.

Siegel managed to entertain the crowd of 15,000 just fine, all by himself.

He has a unique performing style. He has infectious energy and good humor, and it spills over to the audience. He's having fun and the crowd shares the good time.

Although Siegel was on the stage by himself, you could have been fooled. With his singing, virtuoso harmonica licks and piano playing, he sounded like more than one. When he sang and played harmonica on the same tune, it was positively eerie.

After he got the agreeable festival-crowd into the blues mood, the Siegel-Schwall Band took the stage. With the sound system greatly improved this year, the band could be heard well in all areas of the field.

The band had some of the greatest blues musicians around, including drummer Sam Lay, who has played with Muddy Waters and Bob Dylan.

It didn't take long for the audience to become totally caught up in this band. Their tunes had quirky, funny lyrics, and superb playing by all. Every song was different but they were all playful, joyful songs.

But the star of the show was ... again ... Corky Siegel. It's unusual enough that this 50-year-old blues star is white, but he's also squirrely and scrawny, bearded and balding, and jumping all over the stage.

Each member of the band had a



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Corky Siegel performs his blues solo act Monday night at the Michigan Festival's Oldsmobile Main Stage.

different personality and they all had a chance to show it off.

Jim Schwall has a bland vocal style, but his guitar playing was awesome. Bassist Rolo Radford provided a tight bass sound and sang some wildly eccentric songs. Drummer Sam Lay was the heart of the band and sang some fine vocals, too.

Siegel never stopped astounding the audience with his harmonica playing. He coaxed the tiny instrument to sound like a human voice crying, whining and even kissing.

He enjoyed sliding slowly up to notes and making loud squeals.

The festival audience, whether sitting up in the front or on lawn chairs, were bouncing, clapping and laughing with the music. The strong blues beat was infectious, and even people standing on the lawn by themselves were wound up in the music.

At the end, Siegel brought out his Lansing friend, Boogie Bob Baldori, to sit in on two numbers. The audience loved it and stayed to the very end with a standing ovation.