

## What I Did This Summer: Reggae Odyssey at Vans Warped Tour

Posted by Austen on Jul 08, 2011 | [Leave a Comment](#)



I had a plan going into Warped Tour on Thursday, I really did. I'd looked through the band list, figured out where I'd most like to cover things and decided I'd write a story about one specific stage which seems to most specifically mesh with the sorts of things I'd like to cover. The Tilly's/Alternative Press Stage featured acts like The Aggrolites, Lionize and the Expendables, the sort of danceable ska/reggae beats I really dig. Unfortunately, it was only about fifteen minutes after my arrival that I learned my plan was seriously flawed and would be impossible to accomplish.

There were two major reasons I couldn't possibly stay at the AP Stage for most of the day as I'd planned. First off, the AP stage shared the main pavilion with the Nintendo 3DS stage, each spending half an hour playing while another band set up on the other half of the stage. Unfortunately, the 3DS stage was booked almost completely with the sort of music that grates on me like nails on a chalkboard. Acts like I Set My Friends on Fire and The Wonder Years, average pop music that I just find painfully boring. It led to a very schizophrenic feeling under the main pavilion as desperately different acts shared the same space.

More importantly, though, was the second reason I couldn't stand to remain at the AP Stage: both Big D and The Kids Table and Simple Plan were playing there in the middle of the day. Aside from the loss of my dignity, I'm reasonably certain I would have endured some sort of horrible brain hemorrhage had I remained and listened to them.

As a brief aside, I'd like to point out I have a long standing loathing of Big D and the Kids Table. They're precisely the sort of trash ska that drives people away from better music or, conversely, invites douchebags into the semi-secret ska fan club. Every time I see a kid wearing a Big D and the Kids Table shirt at a show, I have an inexplicable urge to roundhouse kick him in the face.

Back on topic. I stayed at the AP/3DS stage combo long enough to learn that I a) hate I Set My Friends on Fire and b) bizarrely actually enjoy The Ready Set. The problem with pop music is that most of it is run of the mill trash and I was fairly surprised to find The Ready Set to be fairly interesting.

The Ready Set is really just Jordan Witzigreuter and a backing band. He does all the writing and recording himself, and his particular mix of electronics, vocal enhancements and some of the catchiest lyrics I've heard in a while is actually quite good. Witzigreuter is also an Indiana native, so that's something. He's also quite short, and I found it fairly amusing that they'd erected a sort of smaller stage on the stage so he could stand up above his backing band.

After The Ready Set, I decided to widen my search for danceable downbeat and found my way to the much smaller Skullcandy Stage, where Passafire, a roots reggae act from Savannah, Ga. was playing. I'd never

heard of them but while I was setting up interviews their tour manager had mentioned they were playing, so I decided to go check them out. My thinking at the time was even bad reggae would be better than what I'd been enduring.

I was really happy that I stopped by to see them. Their set was really excellent and unfortunately, I don't think a lot of people noticed. They had a meager crowd, maybe fifty people gathered around. They have a more complex keyboard element than a lot of reggae you hear today and an electronica sort of influence I really enjoyed. They also rely on more complicated guitar work than much of the standard fare you typically hear in mellow reggae tunes. My first impression was of something along the lines of Rush as interpreted through a reggae lens. I actually had a chance to talk to them later on in the day, so keep an eye out for my interview with them in the next few days.

There was a gap in my day where I didn't get a chance to see a lot of music while I was busy conducting interviews with several bands. I always enjoy getting the chance to sit down (or stand outside of the press trailer, as it were) with great musicians.

I also took the chance to get something to eat and I'll keep my griping on the subject brief. I don't like big music venues for this reason specifically. I spent \$11 dollars on a small Coke, a crappy hotdog and some cheap fries. The prices aren't even consistent across the venue at Verizon Wireless; I spent \$4 on a bottle of water one place and later found \$3 bottles. My normal response to crappy music is to drink and cut the edge, but a 24 ounce shit-tier can of beer was \$11 and I assume I would have needed to sacrifice my first born to get something worth drinking.

Anyway, I basically came to Warped Tour overall for one band and they were one of the last bands I saw that day. I fell in love with The Aggrolites several years ago when I was starting to get into more traditional ska and reggae. The Aggrolites play something they call "dirty reggae" a blend of classic downbeat and a more modern punk influenced ska element with a healthy dose of Motown style soul. It's good, really good, and I think they had a heavy influence on my current favorite touring band, The Green Room Rockers.

The Aggrolites have a style about them that's sorely lacking from most of Warped Tour. Where most acts at Warped are crass and crude, the Aggrolites have a certain refinement, well-dressed and stylish. They played a solid set, even managing to get the generally stoic crowd to start dancing on a few occasions. I don't think the kids coming to Warped Tour get it, though. There was a much larger crowd of people waiting for the next band, Go Radio, to play at 3DS than watching the Aggrolites.

And I really don't honestly understand the appeal. I sat through Go Radio's set only because The Expendables were playing next and there wasn't much else I cared to see at that particular moment. In retrospect, I should have just wandered off. Go Radio is a run-of-the-mill, purely average pop-rock act. There is absolutely nothing noteworthy about them, yet somehow they drew a huge crowd while innovative, progressive reggae acts like the Aggrolites had only a few dedicated fans. I realized, sitting there, that I was witnessing the long dead corpse of innovation in the popular music industry, a shambling horror that has no right to exist.

I'm obviously being a bit melodramatic, but this is why all popular music sounds the same; teenagers come in droves to see it. It's really very depressing.

Finally for the evening, I watched the Expendables, and I enjoyed their set. The Expendables are a ska influenced punk act and their lead singer has fantastic energy. There's a certain manic enthusiasm at play in their performance that isn't often seen at many of the obnoxiously intense punk shows I tend to find myself at. Nobody's taking themselves seriously when the Expendables are playing and sometimes that's a good thing.

Kids today don't seem to want to dance, though. Back in the day, when I was 14 or 15 and I started going to shows on a regular basis, I was doing it because I liked to dance. The kids at Warped Tour all seemed to just stand moodily, presumably brooding over whatever teenage drama was plaguing them. Even the kids

who did come out for The Expendables, a band whose set absolutely screams for people to get moving, just stood awkwardly, maybe rocking back and forth and bobbing their heads. Maybe, somewhere, kids just aren't learning what you do at a punk show anymore.

It's funny, though, at the little shows I go to, at the ES Jungle or crappy basement shows, there's no shortage of dancing and moshing and general enthusiasm. Maybe kids at Warped Tour are just taking themselves too seriously.

Overall, I enjoyed my time at Warped Tour. The Aggrolites released a new live album at the show and I picked up a copy to review, so be sure to check back in the next couple of weeks for that. My complaints aside, Warped Tour really is a great place to hear new things, to meet new people and to possibly find a new favorite. If and when you go, don't hesitate to wander, to listen, to try and find something different. There's so much variety at the show now there's a little something for everyone and you just might find that something that's been missing from your musical life.