

Vans Warped Tour 2011

By [Jason Woodbury](#) Mon., Aug. 8 2011 at 9:00 AM

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Maria Vassett

Eyes Set to Kill

The heat. Yeah, that's the first thing you expect when you start reading about the **Vans Warped Tour**. Yes, it was hot. Yes, most of the stages, merch booths, and product tents are set up on a parking lot, and of course, this is not helpful in regards to staying cool.

But the heat isn't what amazes me. What really blows me away is the fact that thousands of people willingly come and hang out at Warped Tour each year it rolls through Phoenix. All day, without much complaint.

Sure, concessions are expensive, people who should be clothed aren't, and "punk is dead," but nobody told all these folks, who soldiered on to catch bands on seven different stages.

I caught the tail end of **Larry and His Flask's** set. The Oregon band was all over the stage, looking like they had sweat enough for a few weeks. The tunes were cast in this strange

netherworld between punk and traditional Americana. Armed with banjos, acoustic guitars, and some serious drums, the band went insane for the modest crowd gathered before the **Kia Kevin Says Stage**. You may not expect to see an acoustic weirdo-rustic folk punk band on display at the Warped Tour, but like we **pointed out in our print issue**, things aren't really that contained anymore.

The Expendables played on the **Ashley Furniture HomeStore Pavilion** (I never get sick of typing that) main-stage, which was divided into two stages for Warped purposes. The band plays reggae-influenced punk, but more of their set was devoted to out-of-control guitar histrionics. No one is claiming that the Warped Tour promotes archaic punk values, but it's still funny to hear a band that has more in common with **Van Halen** considered a "punk" band. The arena rock vibe was way cooler than the bro-dude reggae jams. I would be very happy if we let the ghost of **Sublime** rest easy, but since the actual surviving members of Sublime **won't even do that**, I guess I can't ask The Expendables to.

Family Force 5 followed immediately (the stage set up assures almost no lag time, something you've got to respect). I don't think I've been more mystified by a band since seeing **Sunn O)))** in Los Angeles a few years back. I'm not sure I enjoyed Family Force 5, but I definitely was utterly drawn into their set, which featured the band's strange fusion of fashionable hardcore and crunk-style Southern Rap.

The band paraded on stage with ballooned images of each member's face, hoisted up on poles attached to backpacks. The spectacle wasn't entirely visual -- though some insane dance moves and a Flaming Lips-style crowd bubble certainly were feasts for the eyes -- as the band's sound is practically technicolor blur. Singer Solomon Olds sang about "shawties," "ghostriding the whip," and "doing the wobble," but the band is outspokenly Christian. The crowd didn't mind the proselytizing, subtle as it was, and simply got down to the absolutely heavy as hell grooves. "We don't believe in circle pits," Olds stated. "We believe in 'droppin' it low' pits!"

I made sure to catch a few Phoenix bands while I was at it. Eyes Set to Kill, who are releasing a new album, *White Lotus*, on August 20 at **Martini Ranch** (I know, because the band reminded the crowd a dozen times), were much heavier than I expected. I guess I had only ever seen promo photos of the group and assumed they were a **Paramore**-knock off, but in actuality, the group was really solid at the post-hardcore thing.



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Eyes Set to Kill

Singer/guitarist Alexia Rodriguez held her own against the heat, while hypeman/screamer/guitarist Cisco Miranda repeatedly told the audience to "fuckin' move" and fuckin'...I don't know, do other stuff, I guess. The band sort of hit the same note their entire set, but it was refreshing to get rocked when you are expecting something else.

Speaking of something else -- Phoenix-based electro-act Blood on the Dance Floor has garnered a lot of controversy. Check out this hilarious article from Christwire.org, called "[Is 'Blood on the Dance Floor' the Most Vile Band in Human History?](#)" I'm not all that "shocked" by BOTDF, but I certainly can see why parents wouldn't want their kids listening to the band. But that's exactly who would be into the band's music -- I can't see adults being as titillated by such lines as "hit me up/make me cum/wanna sext?/I'll show you some," from the band's song "Sexting." The songs don't even seem to be about actual sex, just some sort of distorted tween *idea* of sex.



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Blood on the Dance Floor

The band paraded a Pokemon character on stage, too, making the strange mix of barely pubescent lyrics and cartoon characters made me think of Louis C.K.'s excellent joke about 15-year old sex drive: "Sex has something behind it and it's weird, 'cause we ignore it. Sex is really trying to get somewhere, it's trying to have a family. You don't really wanna know that because we've separated those two things, but the entire reason sex exists is to have babies. That the only reason it exists at all, but we're such a narcissistic species that we've separated it...'Cause that urge is the urge to procreate. A horny teenage boy is thinking, "I want a baby...But we make it this separate thing."

The band certainly has star-power working for them, and the controversy regarding the band's illicit activities is probably only working in their favor. It's rare that a band can even manage to be controversial, so good on the band for all that spilled ink.



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Less Than Jake

Following my confusing time with Blood on the Dance Floor, I went and spent some time with something a little more familiar. I don't own any **Less Than Jake** albums, but the band seems to have just always been around. I'm not really paying attention, but it seems like the band is in town every twelve-or-so minutes. With a bassist on loan from **Passafire** ("the second smelliest bassist on the tour"), the band tore through their hits. I guess I never would have expected a band like Less Than Jake to achieve seminal status, but like Warped itself, there's something charmingly resonant and enduring about the band.

As I turned made my way toward the gates, I heard a strange sound. It sounded like...rock 'n' roll? A little investigation brought me to the foot of the Kia Kevin Says Stage once again, to watch and listen to the English punk band **Sharks**. The band tapped into the vein of classic stuff: **The Jam, The Clash, The Buzzcocks**. Hot damn, a legitimately exciting band. When they pulled out a cover of The Replacements' "Can't Hardly Wait," I was practically ready to sign on the dotted line.

Just when you think you had Warped all sussed out, it goes and surprises you. The surprise being some genuine, melodic punk rock? Go figure.

Critic's Notebook

Last Night: The Van's Warped Tour 2011

The Crowd: What do you think? Tweens and lifers, bros, parents, band members, people working the activists tents, people passing out fliers.

Overheard: "I figured in August, it wouldn't be that hot."

Spotted: An faux-American Apparel style shirt that read "Fuck Hipsters." I thought about how it would be the most hipster thing imaginable for a hipster to sport that shirt, then I thought about how I never want to use the word "hipster" in print again. Watch me fail, people, watch me fail.

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