



Sape, a traditional musical instrument



Audience participation workshop



Blackbeard's Pub (UK)

MUSIC

without borders

Story & Photos by DAVID BOWDEN

It's a hot and humid night in Sarawak and I'm surrounded by thousands of bodies that are as hot as the night. Everyone is swaying to music that constantly changes over the course of a few hours. It started with a group of Mongolian throat singers whose melodious guttural tones resembled the birds and wind of the Gobi Desert and ended with a madcap trio of Scotsmen, one of who was suspended from the shoulders of his colleague upside down while playing an accordion.

Welcome to the Rainforest World Music Festival staged in the spacious grounds of the Sarawak Cultural Village in the coastal rainforests of Damai Beach. I've been to a few of these festivals over the past decade and each one has been memorable with a diverse range of music performed within a friendly atmosphere.

In a world that is increasingly being dominated by contemporary Western music, the sound of indigenous music is being slowly silenced. Global brands ensure that the music of Rihanna and Alt-J is what young people listen to on their iPods the world over just as they clamour to eat Burger King, drink Pepsi and wear Levi jeans.

The festival has always set out to entertain the crowds but also to broaden their repertoire of musical genres. Not all the music maybe appreciated by all the people all the time, however, I have to admire the festival's artistic direction and the fact that it is prepared to take the occasional musical risk. Even if one or two groups aren't to everybody's liking, few question the high calibre of musicianship.

While the music is the primary reason for attending the festival, it really doesn't matter who is performing, as the musicians are all superb and often the best in their musical genre.



Night time picnic



Dakha Brakha (Ukraine)



Dance workshop

festival will ensure the rainforest resounds to the infectious beat of world music. This three-day musical event with its rainforest backdrop at the base of Mount Santubong towering 800 metres overhead attracts some 20,000 music lovers.

Numbers are capped to ensure a quality event with an emphasis on crowd comfort. People sprawl over the site with many content to merely laze around the lake while watching the performances on several big screens. The final act on the last night is reserved for the most upbeat performers who usually whip the crowd into a frenzied state before all groups join them on stage for the grand finale.

just what is world music? Many proponents of the musical genre snigger at labelling their efforts. For the uninitiated, a representative from Inka Marka, a group that performed at the festival a few years back described world music as: "Ancestral music – it's in your DNA." Haritra Rasoanaivo from Madagascan band Tarika Be sums it up as: "Story telling – the struggle of the people – it's political and engaging."

The festival also supports the continuation of the music and culture of Sarawak's multi-ethnic community. Each festival has traditionally started with Sarawakian music and usually there's a sape (lute-like instrument) somewhere on the programme.

Infectious Beat

From the 20th to 22nd June this year, the

Musical DNA

A question that constantly arises at events like the Rainforest World Music Festival is;

Work It

The festival is a Sarawak Tourism initiative to help promote the state as a tourist des-

tinuation as well as providing a platform for local communities and an increasing number of foreign tourists to have fun in the forest. It provides the opportunity for the rhythm and beat of local Sarawakian music to combine harmoniously with leading world musicians.

Spokesperson for one of the past performing groups, the Kalapang Kelabit Bamboo Band from Sarawak's Kelabit Highland summed up a deeper meaning for the festival's existence when she stated that: "When the culture dies, the people die." Considering there are just 6,000 Kelabits left in northern Sarawak, festivals like this are very important for the continuation of their culture. World music is indeed a music that has a past but should also be an integral part of the future.

With a 2014 festival line up of global musicians, it's easy to appreciate that there are no geographical boundaries to world music – indeed, it is music without borders.

This year concertgoers will be able to listen to appreciate the following musicians – Blackbeard's Tea Party (UK), Ganzoniere Grecanico Salentino (Italy), Dakhabrakha (Ukraine), Debademba (Africa), Ding Yi Music Company (Singapore), Gema Seribu (Malaysia), Geng Wak Long (Malaysia), Gordie Mackeeman and His Rhythm Boys (Canada), Horomona Horo (NZ), Jagwa Music (Tanzania), Jamie Smith's Mabon (Wales), Kalakan (Spain), Karinthalakoottam (India), Lo Còr de la Plana (France), Nading Rhapsody (Sarawak), Ryuz (Japan), Son Yambu (Cuba), Stephan Micus (Germany), Talago Buni (Indonesia) and Yayasan Warisan Johore (Malaysia).

The festival has become much more than a musical event as the international world music acts complement the local music and introduce Sarawakians to a range of music they don't normally have their radio tuned into. In doing so, it provides value to the local ethnic music and to the other acts that in many cases; represent music which is dying in their native country.

Join in the fun as Sarawak strives to ensure that the rhythms of the forests pulsate alongside the beat of the world.

Contact: www.rwmf.net and www.sarawaktourism.com. Tickets should be purchased in advance (www.ticketpro.com.my) or in Kota Kinabalu from Pan Bright Travel Service (T: 088 538-570).