

Solutions For Dreamers Festival with Spearhead, Jack Johnson and more

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One moment Lev Allanblitz was a fan in the audience freaking out to [Michael Franti and Spearhead](#). The next he was commanding the Arlington Theater's stage, belting out a verse of [Sublime's](#) "What I Got." This was just one of many spine-tingling highlights of the first [Solutions for Dreamers Festival](#). Conceived as a benefit for [Heal the Ocean](#), it was brought to life by a team of ambitious visionaries and eco-friendly sponsors. Graced with a talented lineup of passionate musician and a promenade of environmentalist booths, the spirit could not have been more positive. Throw in a bevy of elaborate puppet, prop and costume designs, and Santa Barbara had itself a multimedia event for the ages.

Early in the morning of what would be a gorgeous, sunny Saturday, [Jack Johnson](#) landed on a red-eye from Hawaii. Practically the patron saint of Heal the Ocean, he helped make the night extra special by sitting in with three of the four bands. His bandmate, drummer Adam Topol, kicked things off with a short set from his side project, [Culver City Dub Collective](#). The sextet unfurled their thick, rhythmic force on the empty theater. Soaring tenor sax solos cascaded on top of the rich, textural base of dub, jazz and soul.

Some artists play music to wake people up while others intend to create an escape. [Matthew McAvene](#) accomplishes both simultaneously. Holding nothing back emotionally, his songs have that rare ability to linger on the mind while revealing deeper meanings. Playing only his third appearance with a complete band, this quartet is clearly onto something. Anders Bergstrom's mandolin stamps the sound with honest Americana while Steve Campbell injects primal power from behind the drum kit.

Admirably transitioning from coffeehouse to theater, McAvene's salt-of-the-Earth voice understands the spectrum of pain and hope on gems like, "Thin Line." He gave way to a sobering interlude when terminally-ill friend, [Danny Riley](#), stopped the room in its tracks, performing one of his songs. Nice-guy McAvene is also a master puppeteer, committed to wowing people visually

as well as aurally. The theme of the event was all-encompassing thanks to an array of ocean creatures dramatically presented throughout the night.. McAvene is pioneering an exciting, theatrical movement, adding new dimensions to a concert's capacity for sensory stimulation.

If you were trying to dance in the seats during [Animal Liberation Orchestra's](#) set, chances are you came away with a bruise or two. The hometown heroes kept the heat rising as they ripped through an 80-minute set of their typically-uplifting California soul. "Shapeshifter" spiraled listeners through a sonic whirlpool generated by keyboardist/singer, Zach Gill. Bassist Steve Adams used the group's first appearance in its hometown's biggest theater to stretch the depths of his low-end frequency.

College buddy Jack Johnson joined the fun at the end of the set, fittingly concluding with ALOs homage to Isla Vista, "Wasting Time." Beastie Boys-cohort, [Money Mark](#), livened the mix with melodica while guitarist, Dan Lebowitz, dished out a searing slide solo. In between sets, an underwater documentary offered a transcendental excursion to the deep. Dyson Sphere's dissonant soundtrack evoked otherworldly beauty in the movements of stringrays and jellyfish.

The tone was set just by staring at the backdrop - a peace sign in a bullseye surrounded by bullet holes - and military camouflage nets draped over speakers. A war siren signaled the beginning of our evening's final phase as the audience instantly surrendered themselves to the guidance of Michael Franti. In the vein of [Bob Marley](#), the 6'6, dreaded troubadour captivates his people like a true musical shaman. When he asks the crowd to jump up and down, that's exactly what it wants to do.

Drawing awareness to the human toll of war is a responsibility Franti has taken on with piercing conviction. Like a hip hop Marley, his songs convey simple messages which resonate on a universal frequency. Along with his sonic assault squad, Spearhead, they unleashed an extended set of older favorites and all the best songs off last year's release, "Yell Fire!" It was a night for deep bass as Carl Young repeatedly strutted center-stage, dropping bombs from behind wicked-cool sunglasses. Drummer Manas Itene from Nigeria gives Spearhead an authentic dancehall vibe with his tropical bounce and towering vocal octaves. Laying down a swinging groove, he turned "Hey Now Now" into a carnival ride.

In comparison to their set days before in L.A., the energy in Santa Barbara was on a whole other level. "East to the West" and "Sweet Little Lies" were both chilling and jubilant. "Hello Bonjour" lit the place up with hypnotic dance appeal while the irreverent spirit of the aforementioned "What I Got" elicited pandemonium. Keeping the pedal to the metal through a three song encore, we were sent off with the one-two punch of "Stay Human" and "Everybody Ona Move." During the finale, 20 costumed dancers shared the stage as the excess of joy bubbled over the brim. In the midst of it all, the peaceful revolutionary just stood there grinning.





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Culver City Dub Collective f/ Jack Johnson















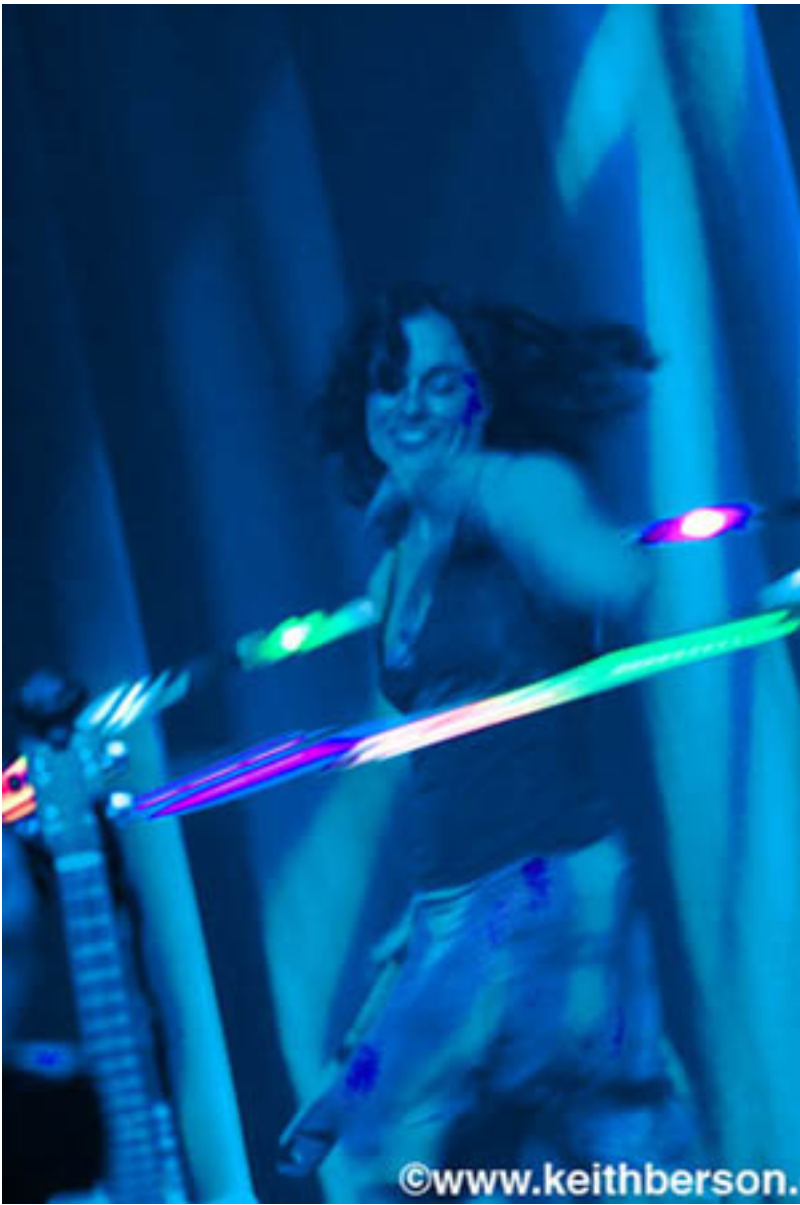
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