

The Spirit of Shakori

by Michael Carmichael
Contributor Arts and Culture

Sensing the upsurge of energy as the north pole of our tiny blue planet shifts upward, and searching for a connection to the season of rebirth, rejuvenation and reconstitution, my publisher provided me with press credentials for the Shakori Hills festival and opened the path for my next quest into the mystery.

From a leafy cul-de-sac in Circle City, I started the Blue Lily, my sky blue Lincoln, and set the GPS for 1439 Henderson Tanyard Road, the site of the magnetic Spring festival in Chatham County's Piedmont. Every Spring, Sirens summon thousands of campers into their tents, campers, teepees and wikieups, and various forms of shelter familiar to the Shakori, a native American people who originally lived in the Piedmont but ultimately were driven westward and into extinction by ultraviolet invaders from Europe, who despised their natural peaceful shamanic culture.

With a kaleidoscopic collection of attractions, the rolling Shakori Hills beckoned me forward through gates of friendly security greeters who welcomed me warmly to their Spring festival. The Shakori cornucopia of hospitality overwhelms visitors with a profusion of potent magic. Camping, dancing, music, craft, healing, food and workshops unfolded their powers for the abundance of joyful children and their smiling parents. Possibilities for the pleasure of learning something new roll over the swelling tides of forest and hills alive with tents offering a sea of possibilities set peacefully into the undulating Piedmont of Shakori.

Wandering along the sinuous paths between the towering pines, the mysteries of Shakori multiplied. Scores of happy people engaged in synchronized dance in a huge tent. The crafts of Native America presented a plethora of devices, crystals, incense, smudges and jewelry fashioned by the artisans who crafted the dream catchers, the flutes, the sovereign gems, the paintings and talismans that quietly but confidently hypnotize and impel the romantic dimensions of consciousness.

In the Food! area, a vegetable curry from Kerala fortified me for the next phase of this expedition. Meandering through the stone maze in the Labyrinthine Medicine Wheel and stone towers in the Peace Park, I realized the people inhabiting Shakori nation were a happy, contented, friendly, welcoming, and optimistic tribal community. The cool positive vibe captivated me almost immediately. Shakori citizenry radiated wellness, balance and openness to the multitude of experiences over the four-day weekend of the Grassroots Festival.

In previous years, sources gave me conflicting impressions of the festival. Some said the festival centered on good music, while others said the festival involved copious consumption of a broad array of intoxicating substances. During my survey, I saw only one person smoking a cigarette, zero cannabis, only one vaper, and only two consuming beer. Zero whiskey, zero wine, zero spirits, zero drugs, zero overdoses, zero drunks, zero accidents, zero guns, zero loud voices, zero anger, zero fights, zero bigotry, zero racism, and zero bad vibes.

While the vibe purred like 7,000 contented cats, I surfed along the crest of a wave of positive energy searching for the pipeline to



Steve Earle and The Dukes performed at Shakori.

PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL CARMICHAEL

Shakori paradise.

Along the way, I met North Carolina artists who travelled throughout India for many months to absorb the enigmas of the sub-continent of mystics. Others were long-serving members of the tribe. Now 60 years old and engaged to be married this June, Fred from Raleigh attends Shakori every year to reconnect with the energy of his dreams. An ex-roadie named Rex rides the waves of country rock, roots and reggae wherever they lead him. Every impression confirmed that Shakori was the right place at the right time.

On the Meadow Stage, Chicano Batman delivered a striking virtuoso fusion spanning many musical genres. Based in Los Angeles, it would not be surprising if Quentin Tarantino will opt for the Chicano Batman sound in one of his forthcoming films.

The classic outlaw country rock magician, Steve Earle and The Dukes, headlined the evening. By twilight, the audience was keening with anticipation for their first Steve Earle experience. The crowd in front of the Meadow Stage grew enormously, and the mosh pit was jammed with fervent fans of the legendary outlaw spirit of country rock.

The ovation thundered when Steve Earle strode on stage. The band opened with a gargantuan wall of sound to embrace and engulf the audience. The power was building and the energy surged, but technical demons intervened and wreaked havoc for the first half hour. Steve Earle actually abandoned the stage not once, but twice in justifiable but desperate frustration while emphasizing that local gremlins haunting Shakori were the culprits attempting to eclipse his performance. After two embarrassing exits due to the failures of sound technicians, Steve Earle & The Dukes bravely mounted the stage a third time and set into their overpowering sonic bombardment that shook and rocked and stunned the Shakori nation. Energized by the battle with technical forces beyond his control, Earle summoned the seraphim, the cherubim, the

powers and the thrones to build the momentum of his now forestalled concert. Earle drove and lashed and blasted his wrath and his fury as he transformed the consciousness of his faithful multitude into torrents of joy. The mosh pit surged through seven stages of ecstasy.

Steve Earle reigns as the ultimate guitar hero of outlaw rock. With the concert finally on course and building speed, intensity and momentum, Earle alternated guitars for almost every song in his playlist. Although I have seen many of the great classic rock and blues guitarists, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, B.B. King, Duane Eddy, Jimi Hendrix, Keith Richards, Peter Townshend, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Ritchie Blackmore, Jerry Garcia, Martin Barre, Billy Gibbons, Angus Young and Rick Ocasek to name just a few, I have never seen any of them change instruments even half as many times as Steve Earle, who reeled and rocked several electric guitars as well as electrically amplified mandolin, banjo and bouzouki.

The hardcore outlaws ruled the mosh pit singing every word of every song and exulting in the ultrasonic aura of their idol. When the crew brought Earle his custom mini guitar, he gazed over the audience to detect those who grasped the significance of this auspicious gesture. With the first chord, the audience erupted in song—the master played his masterpiece, “Copperhead Road.” This classic anthem of outlaw country records the family history of the John Lee Pettimores I, II and III, a lineage of private distillers of illicit ‘moonshine’ who fought the law so well that a revenue man never came back from their fortress, Copperhead Road. John Lee Pettimore the First died tragically in a blaze of heroic glory at the wheel of his big black Dodge hurtling over the twisting country roads pursued by the law. Pettimore’s grandson did “two tours of duty in Vietnam” and came home with “A brand new plan” to cultivate cannabis in the danger zone of Copperhead Road to the eternal consternation of the DEA with “their choppers in the air.”

Elevating the energy level to the heavens,

Earle and his band reeled through a tumultuous coda of songs that culminated in an electrifying rendition of “Hey Joe” by Jimi Hendrix. The Dukes rose to the occasion and upgraded the original. Jimi would have loved to hear their blazing tribute to his guitar genius.

Acclaimed as a genius songwriter, Steve Earle tells the truth through stories hallowed in the outlaw heartlands of America. In addition to writing songs, Earle possesses a highly refined political conscience. An outspoken socialist and supporter of Bernie Sanders, Earle is pro-choice, anti-gun, against capital punishment and favors drug reform. An artist on a mission, Earle penned a song about the Confederate Flag, “Mississippi, It’s Time.”

First verse:

Come on, Mississippi

Mississippi, don't you reckon it's time

That the flag came down, cause the world turned round

And we can't move ahead if we're lookin' behind

Wanna know if you're with me, cause I come from a long long line

Of a rebel strain but the wind has changed

Mississippi, don't you reckon it's time

The lineup of The Dukes that produced this musical tour-de-force involves the talents of Kelly Looney on bass who has worked with Steve Earle for 30 years, Chris Masterson on lead guitar, Elizabeth Whitmore on fiddle, Brad Pemberton on drums and Ricky Ray Jackson on slide steel guitar.

During the concert, Earle introduced each of his virtuosos individually by name and gave them their moment of glory. While this is a seasoned band led by their magisterial conductor, the concert of their energies ravished and exhilarated the audience time after time with instrumental solos. Looney played both electric and acoustic basses setting the tempo and punctuating the pace of the sonic onslaught. Masterson delivered amazing permutations of ascending crescendoes that rival Hendrix. Whitmore's fiddle surpassed the dreams of Paganini performing The Devil's Trill by Tartini. Jackson's steel guitar thrummed penetrating riffs that locked and loaded like a hypnotic eye. Pemberton pounded and punctuated and throbbed the drumbeat straight into the hearts of the audience. Earle's overmastering command of the rhythm guitar piloted and powered the sonic attack that left the crowd aching for more, much more of his intoxicating outlaw music.

AFTERMATH

In the darkening night after staggering over the rolling Piedmont, I sat at the wheel of the Blue Lily and set the controls for Oconeechee as my heart beat with a new and deeper outlaw rhythm than I had ever known before.

This August, Steve Earle and The Dukes return to the heartland of North Carolina with concerts in Raleigh and Charlotte.

Michael Carmichael, an Orange County resident, writes about art and culture.

Visit Us at North Chatham Village Shopping Center

(formerly Cole Park Plaza)

We want to make insurance as easy as possible for you. So now you have two locations to choose from. Stop in and chat — you'll soon see why your neighbors choose to do business with Pam and her team.

Find Pam on 



PAM HERNDON, AGENT

CLU, LUTCF, ChFC

104 S Estes Dr, Ste 105, Chapel Hill

919.240.0155

11470 US Hwy 15-501 N, Ste 105, Chapel Hill

919.265.0702

www.pamherndon.com



State Farm



SILER CITY WELLNESS

Caring for Our Community

DYNAMIC TOUCH, LLC

Massage Therapy
919-602-6785

POSITIVE CHANGE HYPNOTHERAPY

Karen Howard, C.Ht
919-663-1508

REJUVENATE, LLC

Massage Therapy
919-663-0378

STILLPOINT ACUPUNCTURE, LLC

Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine
919-663-1137

229 E. Raleigh Street, Siler City



Circle City Pilates offers personal training on the Balanced Body Pilates Reformer. Movements reposition the body, promoting length, strength, flexibility and balance.

FREE 30-minute Focus Session

MAT CLASSES THURSDAYS, 9:30

(please email to reserve space)

Contact Karen Dalton
www.circlecitypilates.com

13 Hillsboro Street, Suite 7, Pittsboro
(The Blair Building)

ADVERTISE IN CHATHAM COUNTY LINE

Contact Julian Sereno: 919-740-5231 or
editor@chathamcountyline.org