



This past Saturday the Omaha area may have found a new spot to hold events and festivals, or at least a viable option. The Playing With Fire show held at Stinson Park at Aksarben Village was a big success. The free show that featured Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings, Malford Milligan, the Brad Cordle Band, and Blues Ed band Crimson Dawn showed that the area will work out just fine for bigger events. The large permanent stage was more than enough for Sharon Jones, the Dap-Kings, and backup singers. The sound carried well, almost too well, as people inside Aksarben Theater watching the new Harry Potter movie could hear the music. It was a comfortable space, minus the 100 degree weather, where people could spread out with blankets and chairs and not have people on top of them.

The best part for many people was the amount of parking that was available. Parking is a big chunk of the battle when getting people to an event or festival. I was asking people that were coming in at 9 p.m. where they had to park and they shrugged and just said the third floor of the parking garage. The attendance has been debated, but let's just say the park was pretty full by the time Sharon Jones & the Dap Kings took the stage.

The show itself was fantastic from start to finish. Blues Ed band Crimson Dawn is the best of all of the burgeoning young kids and teen projects that I have seen. The girls in the band had no problem pulling off both Adele and Etta James. Local soul man Brad Cordle does not need a big sound system to make his voice carry, but when he has one it is just that much more incredible. He and his band had a solid set and had people dancing in the middle of the day under the blazing sun and scorching heat. Former vocalist for Texas band Storyville, Malford Milligan, took the stage next. He had a crack band with him, and also no real need for the amount of amplification that he was provided with. His pure soul voice worked well on ballads and a capella number and also on the more upbeat rock, funk, and blues numbers. Milligan made some fans in Omaha last weekend.

It's hard to write about Sharon Jones set. I just want to go on and on about how fantastic it was and how pure she is musically and how she is the real deal. The 55-year-old Jones didn't slow down all night. She built the songs and set up, preached, led the band with James Brown like precision, danced with fans, and sang from the purest of places. It was a special set, and Omaha is lucky to have been able to see her, and see her for free.

Was this the final Playing With Fire show? I certainly hope not, and I think the organization exposed itself to a partially new crowd this time out. Hopefully some big sponsors will step up and support the cause. It is shows like this that bring some relevant music to town that isn't the same old stuff that has been seen over and over again. With this being a free show it makes a lot of sense to continue to do these at the park if they continue. The non-free shows such as the upcoming MAHA Music Festival may have a harder time keeping it at Stinson, as they will have to build an 8-foot tall fence around the area. This is a major expense for any festival, and I am not sure that they can afford to do it every year. This year they are going for it and the MAHA crew must have been happy with the reaction to and smooth sailing that happened at Stinson Park this past weekend.

*MarQ Manner has been involved with music in Omaha his entire adult life – from managing and*