

## Blues festival reboots in Ojai

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OJAI, Calif. - It's baaaaack — well, sort of.

The first Ojai Blues Festival is happening Saturday evening at the Ojai Art Center, where back in the early '80s, the iconic Bowlful of Blues kicked off and ran for more than two decades, held mostly at the Libbey Bowl in the heart of downtown. By the numbers, it's four bands, six hours, 25 bucks or if you're mathematically inclined, that's \$4.17 an hour — way less than minimum wage unless you're living in a hut in a dusty Third World country.

The inaugural lineup will include Crooked Eye Tommy and also blues guitar shredder Alastair Greene, blues belter Deb Ryder and Americana, bluesy rock dude, Shawn Jones.

The original Bowlful of Blues was the brain child of Michael Kaufer, who also used to promote a weekly Blue Monday show in Ventura. For years and years, the Bowlful was the 805 festival — routinely packing the venue, while always giving the locals their moments on stage.

The event also showcased pretty much all the living, old-guy blues as well as a bunch of Cajun and zydeco legends plus a memorable reunion show in 1994 of one of the greatest bands of all time, the Chambers Brothers.

However, too often, there was unfortunate tension with the cops as the sheriffs assigned to Ojai seemed to hate fun and even hassled the musicians one year for drinking beer back stage. Many local vehicles sported the bumper sticker: Come To Ojai See A Cop. All this unlikely drama (a dry blues festival?) eventually caused Kaufer to relocate the festival to Lake Casitas, a venue with a more casual relationship with the sauce.

Anyway, the Bowlful lasted for more than two decades and a new one is just beginning. Crooked Eye Tommy is just a week removed from his CD release party in Carpinteria for his new one, “Butterflies & Snakes.” The band is fronted by Tommy Marsh, ably assisted by his brother, Paddy Marsh, as well as a trio of local veterans, Jim Calire, Glade Rasmussen and Tony Cicero.

If and when long hair comes back, Greene will be like a god. He's already one of the best guitar players in the 805. He actually went to school for this, attending the Berklee College of Music. Influenced by the good stuff — Cream, the Allman Brothers, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Peter Green-era Fleetwood Mac — Greene's first trio back in '97 featured members of the Pontiac — a longtime Santa Barbara blues band fronted by Mitch Kashmar. He's been Alan Parson's guitar player since 2010. The trio lineup has changed over the years. These days the other two thirds are Austin Beede and Jim Rankin.

Ryder is yet another blues musician out of Chicago who followed Horace Greeley's advice to "Go West." Her latest album seems to recall a time from deepest antiquity, "Let It Rain."

And finally, there's SoCal local Jones, working hard at working it. He plays around 200 gigs a year and has five albums thus far. Jones made some new fans opening for Paul Thorn recently in Carp.

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