

NERFA. Another RISA Membership Bennie.

Written by Billy Mitchell

Thursday, 27 January 2011 12:08 - Last Updated Monday, 21 February 2011 16:36

NERFA. What the heck is that? I had no clue. Sure, there were photos on the RISA website and stories about playing music all night. And there was the incredibly “robust”, yet confusing NERFA website.

Fellow RISA folks said “you should go”. So I went. Hung out with RISA pals (Chuck Williams, Chris Moon, Joanne Lurgio, Rick Demers). I was absolutely blown away by what lie ahead.

First, a definition: NERFA stands for North East Regional Chapter of Folk Alliance International.

The event in question is NERFA’s annual conference, usually held in the beautiful Hudson Valley (aka, the Catskills) where the following types congregate for a weekend:

- Performers
- Agents
- Booking agents
- Venue and festival promoters,
- Recording industry professionals,
- Graphic artists,
- Folk DJs,
- Journalists,
- Photographers,
- Publicists
- Production professionals

PLEASE READ THIS LIST AGAIN. Roughly translated, if you’re a performer, anyone who can book you in a venue, festival, or house concert; anyone who can play your music on the radio; anyone who can manage you, sign you to a record deal, or record you, is THERE under one roof...and the reason they come is to find new performers for their audiences. Freakin’ Nirvana.

This year there were 800 attendees: 350 performers and 450 people looking for performers. Nice odds.

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Now how does all this work?

Well first off there are all kinds of great workshops each day that cover all the ins and outs of performing, recording, publishing, marketing, booking, pitching. Hoo boy. Tons of knowledge. But wait, there's more.

Lots of "Networking time": happy hour in the lobby (with two free drinks!), downtime lobby schmoozing (amidst some jam sessions).

And there's the "Exhibit Hall" Lots of booths from instrument makers, record producers, festival organizers, performers, etc. time to schmooze again.

But the real mind blower is the "Showcases". This is where performers get to play a short set for the movers and shakers who can get you & your music out there. The selection process varies, and in some cases it's juried, in other cases, you have to watch the NERFA listserv to apply (schmoozing helps a lot too), but in all cases, there's something here for everyone.

Three different Showcase flavors each night:

The Formal Showcase - 7 to 9pm; In the Big Room. 2 hours, 4 performers per hour. Looks like you have to be nationally recognized to qualify though, but as a member of the audience, it's two hours of fantastic music.

TriCentric Showcases. 9 to 11pm. Three Venues – Three performers each venue. Hop around to catch the ones you want to see. These performers are regionally strong and on the brink of national recognition. 800 applicants this year, so it's cream of the upwardly mobile crop. Applying is a long shot for most, but for some, worth a shot.

Guerilla Showcases – 11pm till ????. This is the mother lode. Two floors of the hotel are designated for Guerilla showcases. That means there are about 30 different showcases going

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on all night. Basically the Showcase host turns their room into a venue. 4 songwriters in the round. Change line-ups every hour. (RISA had a showcase this year & will do so again next year). Many of these showcases are sponsored by House Concert promoters, and Venue managers. Instant audition. What's more, promoters, presenters, DJs, cruise the Guerilla showcases looking for the next big thing. Apply for a spot on ahead of time via the NERFA listerv. Many folks were able to play at a dozen or so showcases throughout the weekend. Lots of exposure, lots of networking. Lots of showcase promotion as well...flyers everywhere, ads in program book. Gotta get those movers & shakers to go to your showcase!(RISA will have a few promo tricks up its sleeve next year)

And yes there's even an open mike during the day (sign up way early, though).

But wait, there's more. The lobby of the hotel is jam session central. Spontaneous stuff going on all the time.

AND the food (quite surprisingly) is terrific.

To wrap-up

- Two Solid days of top flight Music
- Workshops
- Networking
- An opportunity to perform for movers & shakers
- Nightly Happy Hour with 2 free drinks.
- A weekend at a resort in the Poconos – all meals included

All for around \$300 a head. As I'm sure someone once said in the Catskills, "Such a Deal"! And if you're an old flower chile, you can even stop by Yagurs Farm...not far at all.

So now that you know, next year, RISA will be planning a strong presence. More info to follow as we get closer to it. Join us.