



The Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF) is one of my favourite events of the year. It's a 'Goldilocks Festival' – not too big and not too small. Over 20,000 attended over the three days of the event. The festival site is spectacular with mountains, sea, beach, jungle and rainforest. There is no bureaucracy, no political speeches while alcohol and skimpy outfits are allowed. The Miri Jazz festival was a week later so I stayed in the Malaysian state for that one too.

SARAWAK HERITAGE

Sarawak has much to offer so there is plenty to do before or after the event either chilling in Kuching, visiting orangutans and proboscis monkeys in national parks, adventure escapes or



World Music & Jazz
in the State of the Festival

MIKE SMITH BOPPED AWAY AT TWO VERY DIFFERENT BUT EQUALLY ENJOYABLE MUSIC FESTIVALS IN SARAWAK.



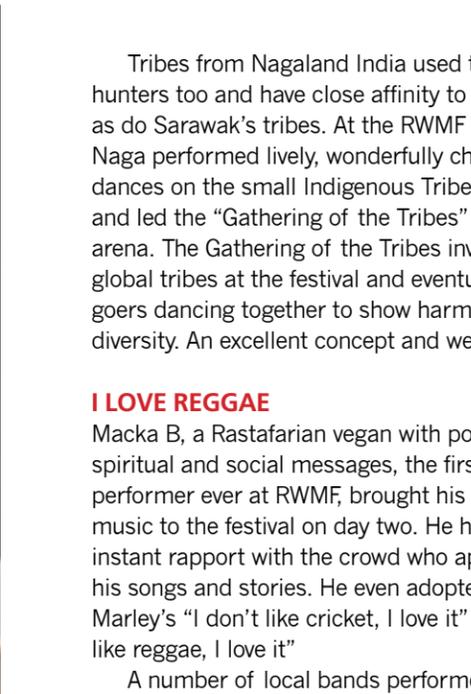
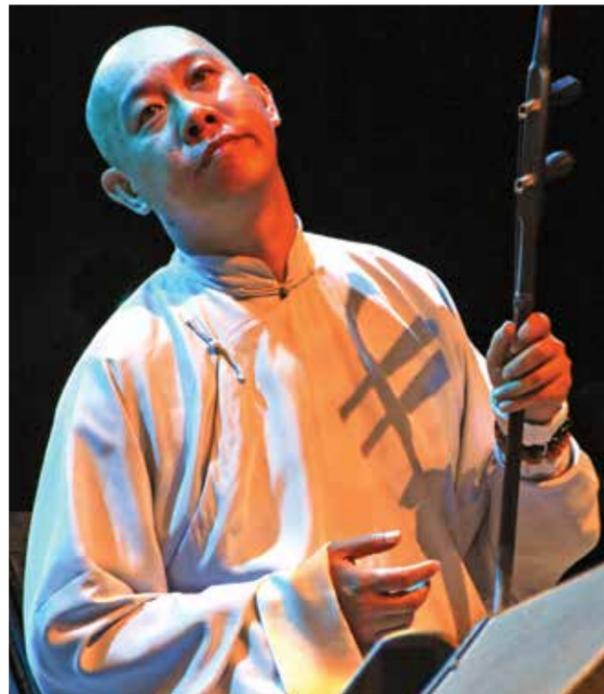
even staying in a long house with the very real skulls that had been taken by head hunters. From an earlier day – that practice is no longer allowed.

The Damai Beach Resort, 32 km from Kuching below majestic Mount Santubong, hosts musicians, dancers, media and guests during the RWMF allowing all to mix, mingle and party. With large rooms, a lovely pool and an isolated beach it is a perfect location and only a short stroll to the Sarawak Cultural Village where the event is held.

BIDAYUH MIRING RITUAL

The RWMF keeps to tribal traditions which includes performing the Bidayuh Miring Ritual, with chicken sacrifice, to appease the gods and ensure a successful festival.

Performers come to RWMF from all over the world. Spirit of the Hornbill from Kalimantan Indonesia started the festival with a visual treat and great music and



dance. The beautiful ladies and handsome men of Ballet Folclorico de Chile Bafochi continued the visual extravaganza with stunning sexy dances, undulating hips and spectacular costumes.

Otava Yo from Russia revive neglected folk tunes from times gone by with new interpretations, uninhibited humour and energetic playing. One track “was written in 1842 for tonight’s concert!”

MORE THAN MUSIC

The RWMF is much more than just a music festival. There are food and drink stalls, craft outlets, tattooists, artists, yoga, tribal dances and rituals and opportunities for people watching. One young Australian attendee had tattoos literally everywhere; yes everywhere!! The mind boggles.

with enthusiasm, energy and artistry. Darmas had the audience hopping and clearly loving every minute!! At Adau brought their traditional melodies of Borneo to the 21st century by mixing both contemporary elements and local instruments including the sape and nose flute. Only a few years ago they were side acts, now they

western music including the mesmerising, high speed “Crazy Horse” where “the horse” behaving irrationally came to life!

I always enjoy the Rainforest World Music Festival and hope to be there next year 10-12 July 2020. Put it in your diary!

CHANGES AT BORNEO JAZZ

The Borneo Jazz Festival has changed from the first time I went a couple of years ago. It used to be a casual, outdoor event but is now primarily indoors at Coco Cabana in Miri creating a club like atmosphere. The music has changed too with an orchestra often dominating the stage, more traditional jazz plus hip-hop, neo soul and rap.

Fortunately, some things haven’t changed. There is still high quality musicianship from local

Tribes from Nagaland India used to be head hunters too and have close affinity to hornbills as do Sarawak’s tribes. At the RWMF Sangtam Naga performed lively, wonderfully choreographed dances on the small Indigenous Tribes Stage and led the “Gathering of the Tribes” in the main arena. The Gathering of the Tribes involved all the global tribes at the festival and eventually festival goers dancing together to show harmony in diversity. An excellent concept and well executed.

I LOVE REGGAE

Macka B, a Rastafarian vegan with political, spiritual and social messages, the first reggae performer ever at RWMF, brought his reggae music to the festival on day two. He had an instant rapport with the crowd who appreciated his songs and stories. He even adopted Bob Marley’s “I don’t like cricket, I love it” to “I don’t like reggae, I love it”

A number of local bands performed at RWMF

command the main Jungle Stage.

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCES

San Salvador from France and Kila from Ireland who did a one off collaboration with Oki Kano were crowd pleasers, but Duplessy & The Violins of the World were the stand out musicians of RWMF 2019. Four talents, four soloists, four cultures, four instruments, four temperaments but one incredible performance combining eastern and



and international artists, workshops, food, arts and crafts and everyone has a great time! Thanks to Evelyn Hii of founder of No Black Tie Jazz club and the event organiser!

HOME IN MIRI

I was very fortunate that my 'home' for the festival was the wonderful Pullman Miri Waterfront Hotel. My room was excellent as was the service, buffet breakfast and lunch. The infinity pool overlooks the city – a great place to chill. Special thanks to the friendly staff in the Ape Bar Lounge.

Orang Ulu Dancers and Musicians performed the Sunset Welcome Ceremony at the Seahorse Stage before the Official Launch of Borneo Jazz

Festival 2019 by Datuk Lee Kim Shin, Assistant Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture.

TRUE TO THE MUSIC

I was lucky to bump into performers Jasmine Chen and Chanda and have long one-on-one discussions as they relaxed with drinks before going on stage. Jasmine studied at Leeds College of Music before heading back to Shanghai to perform regularly at JZ Club. Despite her recent mega success, singing three songs in the movie Crazy Rich Asians including the title track, she was very approachable and happy to chat about her time in Singapore and recent concert with Jeremy Monteiro at the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre.

Chanda was heavily influenced by gospel and church music from a young age and sang in the local choir in Chicago. As her music progressed she moved

to New York City then Washington DC and now Vienna where she lives with her Austrian husband and five-year-old son. This was her first trip to Asia and she lives by the mantra of being true to herself and experimenting in music because there is no right or wrong.

LET THE MUSIC BEGIN!

The Julian Chan Orchestra (Julian was also in Crazy Rich Asians) were the 'house band' and supported numerous artists including Clinton Chua, Pete Kallang, Joe Balanjiu Jr. and Jasmine Chen.

Jasmine Chen's performance oozed class. She looked sensational and ruled the stage. The audience loved her song selections which included her Crazy Rich Asians hit Wo Yao Ni, some original songs and a sultry version of Sway with Me.

I really enjoyed the dashing performance by Dasha Logan who showed off her jazz, soul and R&B repertoire including her hit song Cleverly which topped the UK Soul Chart.

Fox Capture Plan from Japan was excellent too, a three piece band featuring base, keyboards and drums entertained with their "new age, retro jazz".

DJ'S AND YOGA

DJ Maestro from the Netherlands provided late night entertainment and a DJ masterclass workshop. For early birds there was Yoga and Sape music. I missed the 7:30 am shuttle bus. LoL!

Miri has a number of attractions in the city including temples, markets, handicraft centres, petroleum museum and, of course, shopping malls.



DAY TRIPS FROM MIRI

FARM AND TUSAN BEACH

There are a few day trips from Miri, some better than others. If you haven't seen exotic fruit and food cooked in bamboo then consider a trip to a local farm. The farm experience can be combined with a visit to Tusan Beach, but beware as paths to and from the beach are challenging. Nice sunsets and an attractive arch suggesting a horse drinking – if you have a good imagination – are the highlights.

All too soon my 12 days in Sarawak were over. The strategy of holding two festivals on successive weekends seemed to pay off as numerous music lovers extended their trips to Sarawak to attend both. ❖

Pocket Guide



Hotel Damai - Damai Beach Resort, Santubong
www.damaibeachresort.com

Hotel Miri - Pullman Miri Waterfront Hotel
pullman.accorhotels.com

Malaysia Airlines
www.malaysiaairlines.com

Sarawak Tourism Board
sarawaktourism.com