Stern Grove Festival canceled for first time in its 83-year history

Billy Ray Cyrus, Jimmy Cliff among acts on lineup


By JIM HARRINGTON | jharrington@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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The 2020 Stern Grove Festival has been canceled due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and the corresponding moratorium on large gatherings, organizers announced today.

It marks the first time in the event’s 83-year history that it has been canceled.

The popular free festival was set to take place on Sundays from June 14 to Aug. 16 at lovely Stern Grove in San Francisco.

“In these unprecedented times, and in an abundance of caution for the safety and well-being of our staff, artists, audience and the community, we made the difficult decision to cancel this year’s festival,” Stern Grove festival executive director Bob Fiedler said in a news statement. "We are grateful to our board, sponsors and donors, whose support makes it possible to retain our core staff and turn our focus to planning for the 2021 season — we’ll be back, better than ever!"

Bay Area music fans will miss out on what was to be a really strong and appealingly diverse lineup. It had not yet been officially announced to the public, but it was set to include such acts as Animal Collective, Jimmy Cliff, Cuco, Billy Ray Cyrus, Macy Gray, Hanson, San Francisco Ballet, San Francisco Symphony, Tank and the Bangas, Tower of Power, Emily Afton, Cindy Lee, North Mississippi Allstars, The Onyx, Megan Slankard and Ana Tijoux.

Organizers are trying to reschedule some of these acts to appear during the 2021 season. So fans might yet have the chance to sing along to “Achy Breaky Heart” with Billy Ray Cyrus and dance along to “The Harder They Come” with Jimmy Cliff at Stern Grove.

Like many other arts organizations, the Stern Grove Festival is appealing to the public for help during the COVID-19 pandemic. Donations made by individuals this summer will be matched through a challenge grant. Interested parties can find out more information at sterngrove.org/support/.

Organizers are also working on a Best of the Fest virtual video series for the summer featuring highlights from the festival’s library of concert footage from the last 13 years. The weekly concert series will be hosted by TV/radio personality Liam Mayclem and will feature such acts as Sheila E. (from 2012), Pink Martini (2013), the Doobie Brothers (2015) and George Clinton (2016).

The series, which also features artist interviews and other content, kicks off June 14 at sterngrove.org and the festival’s YouTube channel and Facebook page. New episodes will follow each Sunday through Aug. 16. (The lineup for the first show will be made available on May 31 on the website.)
Along with Best of the Fest, organizers said they “will be offering a virtual arts education program utilizing many of the teaching artists who would have participated this summer. Classes in music making and dance will be offered online on the festival’s YouTube and Facebook channels.”

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