

# SunFest's nicely mixed bill

*By Charles Passy, Palm Beach Post Music Writer*  
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WEST PALM BEACH -- As he welcomed the plentiful crowd to SunFest's main stage Saturday night, Nickelback lead singer Chad Kroeger searched for the right words to describe the event he was about to play. He ended up calling it "a rock 'n' roll/reggae/everything else show."

And that about fits.

SunFest's Saturday edition covered a broad spectrum of styles. The "everything else" category alone included traditional jazz, Latin rock, fusion, introspective pop and a skateboarding demonstration. (Hey, it's not quite music, but neither is what some bands play at SunFest.)

Let's first dispense with the rock category, since that was arguably Saturday's biggest draw. Canadian rockers Nickelback brought to SunFest the post-grunge, tortured-soul sound that's dominated the genre in the past few years. To the group's credit, it's a muscular outfit that knows how to play to a crowd.

Think Creed with a little more of a heavy-metal crunch.

But it's a little too *tortured* for this listener. One wishes these bands would learn to lighten up.

In the reggae category, Miami group Ruff House didn't sound the least bit rough, filling its afternoon slot with a cooling breeze of a set. This is old-school reggae, blessed with the spirit of the islands. Chief among the set's highlights: lead singer Carl McDonald's bouncy take on that Sting classic *Roxanne*.

But it was in the "everything else" category where SunFest put on its best show. Pride of place belongs to the Santana Tribute Band, a Delray Beach-based Latin-rock group that proves there's no shame in wearing the "tribute" label.

Of course, it's to the group's advantage that it celebrates an artist known for his eclectic -- and electrifying -- musicianship. There's no one style to mimic, no set tradition to honor. It's more about rocking with a salsa-spiked abandon. If anything, this group put a stronger Latin emphasis on the Santana legacy -- and it kept its jams tighter (and shorter) than Mr. Carlos has upon occasion. The result was something joyful to behold.

Filling out a very busy day were a couple more noteworthy South Florida groups. Broward County's Remember the Ocean, led by the endearing Kristin Larkin, served up a heaping plateful of folk-influenced pop. It brought to mind the Liliith Fair school of a few years back (and pleasant memories they are).

On the other end of the spectrum, Palm Beach County's Sean Michael Mormelo played rock with a gritty edge. His songwriting is somewhat two-dimensional, but his voice could take him far.

Finally, what would SunFest be without some smooth jazz? (A stronger festival perhaps, but we won't harp too much on that point.) Filling the Kenny G slot this year was saxophonist Warren Hill. Let's just say it's the sort of thing some folks like -- just not this particular folk.