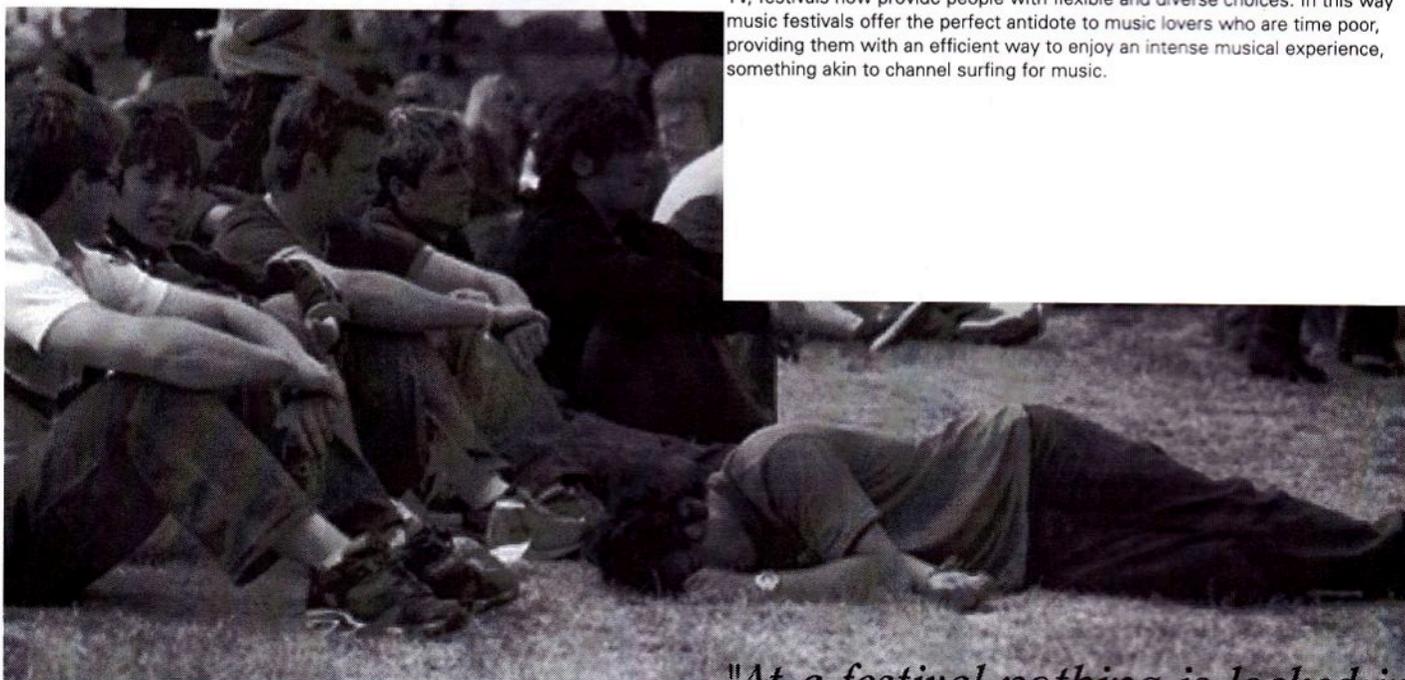


STOP PLAYING WITH THAT DAMN REMOTE!

BY TRACEY SARGENT

After humans came into being and once they'd got that whole fire creation thing sorted, they needed some other way of amusing themselves; thankfully they settled on the creation of music. From humble beginnings, people started coming together to appreciate the spectacle of live music and eventually breathed life into what we now commonly refer to as the music festival.

Becoming more than just a random collection of musicians, festivals have continued to evolve to meet the needs of festival goers. Similarly with Pay TV, festivals now provide people with flexible and diverse choices. In this way music festivals offer the perfect antidote to music lovers who are time poor, providing them with an efficient way to enjoy an intense musical experience, something akin to channel surfing for music.



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The festival experience does not discriminate. Whatever your musical pleasure, whatever your age and whatever your background there is at least one festival which will fit you perfectly. Whether you appreciate rock, pop, folk, country, electronica, metal, R&B, or some amalgamation of styles, musical festivals can deliver all that and more. Aside from providing a range of musical options, festivals also offer diversity of form, differing in size, frequency, duration, and location; it's fair to say that the possibilities are virtually endless.

Just as people watch television shows for different reasons, with some watching for the characters, some for the writing, and others for the plot, it is wrong to assume that people who attend festivals are all interested in the same experience. Whatever their motive, each festival goer becomes part of a collective unit who have come together simultaneously. However, festivals are actually experienced on a very individual and personal level, with no other person able to lay claim to your specific memories. And unlike television shows (which can quickly fade from the mind) festivals provide the kind of unique stories and experiences that become the stuff of your own personal legend.

No matter how well you plan your festival experience, there is always something unexpected. Like flicking channels in the ad breaks, or killing time until your favourite show starts, at a music festival you can and most likely will stumble across a real gem. The fluid connectivity of festival performers is a fantastic opportunity to discover new artists and expand your musical horizons. Without intending to, and simply by following through on this highly organic process based on artistic relatedness, you can discover something quite incredible.

The live musical festival experience is something that simply cannot be replicated by listening to a CD or by watching a DVD of video clips. Instead, the live experience has a real impact which can fundamentally alter your musical tastes from that point on. Sure you may have the ultimate festival experience where an artist is everything you hoped they would be, but this is not always the case; unfortunately with the beauty you sometimes get the beast tagging along also. A band may walk onto the stage and for whatever reason, they suck, or are the most obnoxious and arrogant performers you've ever seen.

There is a positive to this experience though, and just like clicking a button on the remote, you don't have to stay tuned in. At a festival nothing is locked in and nothing is fixed, so if something disappoints or fails to interest, you can simply disengage. You are in control of the experience with the freedom to drift as you please; you can try to see all the artists on offer or you can see none at all. Like being in charge of the remote; the power is in the hands of the individual.

Perhaps when compared to other live music gigs, the price of attending a festival may seem a little high, but not when you consider what you're actually getting for your money. Just as you are able to flick between quality programs on television, festivals allow you to be more risk averse than at regular gigs, giving you the chance to sidestep the rubbish. At a regular show you normally get to see only one or two artists, and consequently place a whole lot of hope on those artists to deliver a great live experience. If they don't quite live up to your expectations you can't help but feel a little ripped off. However at a festival you are likely to see anything upwards of ten artists, so you are able to spread the risk around and reduce the likelihood of your experience being a bit disappointing. Even if

half of the artists at a festival are rubbish (an unrealistically high proportion), you still have more than enough acts who are likely to deliver a quality product and therefore guaranteeing a value for money investment.

The primary difference between passively flicking TV channels and attending a music festival is the opportunity to partake in a real and spontaneously shared experience. Many moments in life are overlooked or neglected, but festivals offer something almost magical. Through the doors or gates of a festival you enter a world where it is possible to capture moments that will never ever be repeated. This is an experience that cannot be replicated by television, where broadcasts are viewed from a cold distance. At a festival you feel the sweat trickle down your back, you give into the beat and dance with abandonment, you join an impromptu chorus of voices in song – you're there at a particular moment, living in that moment and forever part of that moment.

The real challenge to overcome is in choosing which artists you are going to watch. Some people plan ahead, while others go to wherever the mood takes them, but whatever approach is followed, music festivals offer a reward of immeasurable experiential riches. So when an opportunity next presents itself, put the television remote down, turn the stereo off and get thee to a festival!