

Electric Zoo Festival Rocks Labor Day Weekend with Sold-out Crowds

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This past Labor Day weekend, a daily (on both Saturday and Sunday) sold out-crowd of 25,000 electronic dance music fans decamped to Randall's Island to enjoy the beats of the world's best house, trance, techno, electro-groove, break-beat and drum and bass DJs. From 11 am to 11 pm, nearly 70 acts delivered stellar beats to the eclectic attendees. Organizers Made Events recognized the potential for chaos that such an expansive lineup would bring, and to accommodate committed fans, they offered a "make your own schedule" application on its website. "It was easy! I could sample the artists' sounds and with a few clicks design a hit-list that catered to my taste and told me where to go," said one reveler.

There were four different stages at Electric Zoo, each boasting their own sets, intelligent lighting and effects, and featuring a varied line-up of similarly-grouped dance music types. The enormous main stage hosted the headliners, from ATB, Benny Benassi and The Chemical Brothers on Saturday, to Moby and Armin van Buuren on Sunday. The large hilltop venue seemed to focus on progressive trance, electro dance and melodic house, and starred killer acts like Kaskade, Markus Schulz, Steve Aoki and Above & Beyond. Under the Red Bull Music Academy riverside stage, talent hovered around hip hop, electro and big beat, including DJ Mehdi, Fake Blood and Diplo. The final venue dished out retro Detroit beats, techno and progressive house from the likes of Victor Calderone and John Digweed.



Attendees at Electric Zoo ran the gamut. There were crazed Europeans on holiday, hardcore ravers dancing the Hakken, euphoric go-go girls, pot-smoking indie sceneesters, hula-hooping hippies, bridge and tunnel types, jocks, and even die-hards with toddlers in strollers. The diverse and lively hoards certainly reflected the variety and far-reaching appeal that electronic dance music still holds today.

Trance hero Markus Schulz was an early Saturday highlight with his commendable set on the hilltop area. Schulz spun a set that showcased his knack for blending multi-layered, uplifting beats. The audience had been aptly warmed-up thanks to a blistering effort by Gareth Emery, whose hit "Citadel" was sampled on numerous other sets throughout the weekend. Tracks from Schulz's recently released *Do you dream?* also rang throughout his gig. When Schulz integrated a smooth remix of "Without You Near," it was easy to realize why he's America's number one Trance DJ.

The main stage was packed for ATB's 4pm start time. André Tanneberger (ATB), known for his first single "9PM (Till I Come)," of which he teased his fans with throughout the set, before unloading it towards the end, proved he can mix more than just Balearic vocals and ambient symphonic beats. He delivered a rockin' remix of "Ecstasy" and Robin's "Dancing on My Own," both receiving roaring cheers and skywards hand pumps. Another mega-hit on his play list was Sol Noir's "Superstring," which had to be the most sampled song the entire weekend, firmly establishing itself as an electronic dance anthem.

Those who could tear their bodies away from ATB's addictive set made sure to check out the legendary Pete Tong at the hilltop tent. Tong was a perfect segue from afternoon into evening, with his calming Ibiza beats and funky house, keeping it somewhere between 140 and 119 bmp.

A surprise knock-out was Fake Blood (Theo Keating), the mysterious electro star whose identity was under wraps until 2009. The scene at the Red Bull tent got rowdy when Keating dropped the masterful Armand Van Helden's "I Want Your Soul" remix. Fake Blood attracted a massive and diverse audience that was keen on his blend of hip hop, electro and dance-house.

Back on the main stage was Dirty South, who has been nominated for a Grammy award and catapulted to main-stream fame with hugely successful remixes for Britney Spears, U2, Snoop Dogg, Depeche Mode and David Guetta. Memorable tracks from his line-up included a subtle version of Evermore's "It's Too Late." Dirty South's diverse offerings of dance, indie-rock, hip hop and house had the entire main stage area in the air. When the clock struck 7, Major Lazer (producers Diplo and Switch) took over the reigns for a dynamic rock/rap heavy set that forged the atmosphere into fiery dancehall chaos.

Back on the hilltop was perhaps Saturday's best set, Kaskade, who after a very successful year on the charts has garnered a colossal fan base. The hilltop could barely withstand the throngs that whistled and shrieked, as he ignited a frenzy by starting with an epic version of "Angel on My Shoulders." Song after song, Kaskade kept the energy up and didn't fail his followers by omitting his hits. "When my friend told me she was going to this thing called Electric Zoo, I hadn't even heard about it," someone in the crowd confessed. "Then she said Kaskade was playing and I bought my tickets on my iPhone that minute." The consensus is in: Next year, put Kaskade on the main stage—he deserves it.



As the night matured, Grammy winner Benny Benassi took to the main stage for a pulsating set including a rendition of "Satisfaction," and hits from Madonna, Kelis, Shakira and Sneaky Sound System. When asked how Electric Zoo compared to other festivals he's done, Benassi replied, "It's up there with the great festivals but it has an added plus—it's in New York City. I love this town!"

Closing the 12-hour marathon were crowd-drawing The Chemical Brothers, who just released their seventh studio album, *Further*, this summer. The group naturally featured some of their new beats, which seem to be more melodic and danceable—a welcome progression. It was a phenomenal close to a gorgeous day, filled with extraordinary talent, exhilarating consumption, and exhausting dance moves. Those not rendered complete zombies headed to **Pacha** for headlining sets by Sharam and Robbie Rivera.

The masses stumbled back onto Randall's Island early Sunday to hear the likes of Grum (fresh off the success of his hit "Runway") on the main stage. By mid-afternoon, loyal fans of trance masters Cosmic Gate (Nic Chagall and Bossi) had schlepped back—moderately recuperated—to get their groove on at the hilltop, before the duo jetted off to Texas for the Nocturnal Festival. The pair worked in full-throttle mix of sacred trance songs and a version of their smash "I See You" from James Horner's *Avatar*.

Laidback Luke certainly flexed his muscles by throwing out vocal remixes from The Ting Tings, David Guetta and Moby, as well as his new record "Till Tonight" from his own label Mixmash Records. A ten-thousand-strong mob boogied to his beats the entire way, until Moby took center stage in a rare live DJ set. Moby's set traced back to his 80's New York house and hip-hop roots, as well as techno (including his floor-filler "Go") and revamped gospel tunes. A highlight was when he stood atop his huge turntable—hands in the air—guiding his fans through the movements, and backed by LED screens bearing his name.

But it was Above & Beyond's sensational playlist that stole the show on Sunday. An awesome remix of Oceanlab's "On a Good Day" had nearly everyone singing along. Having earned mainstream praise for their Trance Around the World radio show, Above & Beyond drew vibrant and devoted spectators from start to finish. Member Jono Grant commented, "The satellite radios and podcasts have been good for dance music and certainly our careers. We can reach more people and expand electronic dance music's fan base." Tunes from their Anjunabeats and Anjunadeep labels (widely recognized as a premier platform in trance and progressive house) were widely sampled. "This year is a big year for us with the new Anjunabeats series. [Our beat] tempo has slowed down a bit, more groove!" explained Jono. Judging by the engaged swarm that packed their hilltop appearance, Above & Beyond has hit the big leagues.

Dutchman Sander van Doorn followed Above & Beyond with his technically ingenious take on trance, remixing tracks from Sia, The Killers, Pet Shop Boys and Depeche Mode. Van Doorn is an electronic dance festival veteran, with top billings at Creamfields, Mysteryland, Dance Valley and EDC. He fed the mob exactly what it craved—like a pro—as the sun set.



In the final hours of Electric Zoo 2010, most made their way back to the main stage, while thousands of other enthusiasts held-out for popular gigs from Steven Aoki, John Digweed, Victor Calderone and Diplo elsewhere. Fedde Le Grand took over the main stage at precisely 7:50pm, unloading an energy-pumping round of his shiny dance smashes "Put Your Hands Up For Detroit," "Let Me Think About It," "The Creeps," "Back & Forth," and remixes of Sharam, Moby, Will.i.am, Madonna and Eric E. When it came time for the Emperor of Trance, Armin van Buuren, to take over, even the crowd had separation anxiety.

That is until the hazers began misting, high-powered lasers beamed, and moving lights were on full-blast, and van Buuren began to dominate the main stage in a way only the world's number one DJ could. LEDs spelled out "TRANCE" in larger-than-life letters behind the artist, as he spun symphonic synthetic beats, with string orchestral notes and seemingly operatic vocals. When asked why he decided to headline Electric Zoo for the second year in a row, van Buuren said that "The market in the US for me is huge! I sell more here in New York and LA than anywhere else. I've done some really successful shows. People remember under the Brooklyn Bridge, at the Roxy, Pacha, **Roseland Ballroom**—I've been everywhere."

Next week van Buuren releases his fourth artist album, *Mirage*, followed by a massive North American tour, confirming he has no plans of putting on the brakes. Indeed, it was a superb end to a stellar Labor Day weekend. Following the van Buuren set, Moby hosted a surprise after-party at Pacha alongside Guy Gerber.

In closing, van Buuren said it best: "I've been working with Mike Bindra [and Laura De Palma, the couple behind Made Events] that put on Electric Zoo, for a while. They were guests at my wedding. I'm just so thrilled that Mike is doing well, because New York deserves a festival like this. It's kinda of bizarre that it took so long to have a festival such as this and there is a big demand for [it]. They sold something like 27,000 tickets. We want it. It shows the popularity of electronic music." He's all too right.