

17th Eagle Rock Music Festival: Triumphant Return and What's Next – EnClave.LA



by Tom Nguyen

The [17th Annual Eagle Rock Music Festival \(ERMF\)](#) returned this summer a bit late or early depending on your perspective. Late because the festival took a hiatus last year to regroup after tremendous growth, and early because they moved from their usual October date to Saturday, August 20.

It was actually to the festival and fans' benefit that there were so many competing summertime events all over Los Angeles that day. That meant the people who came were really there for what I think was the festival's strongest lineup ever, with acts ranging from soul and funk group [Orgone](#) to [Dengue Fever](#), a Cambodian psychedelic rock group, to many of my favorites like South LA teen duo [Sin Color](#) and East LA's [Cuicani](#) and [La Chamba](#). Instead of the massive 70-80,000 person turnout like in peak years, it was probably about half that and felt like the smaller, more intimate community festival of its roots.

I loved it! With no massive throngs to contend with, I was able to easily zip back and forth between stages. Honestly the festival was a blur, because if I wasn't dancing, I was running between stages for fear of missing out on so many great acts playing simultaneously.



Photo by Alejandro Ohlmaier, courtesy of ERMF

Every performance I saw was solid but three in particular really stood out for me:



Know her name now: [Low Leaf](#). She says she's a Filipina harpist but I think the singer and multi-instrumentalist is a supreme being from another dimension. There is something so indescribably pure and ethereal about her vocals with the wisdom of an old soul in her lyrics. She and her band took me on journey to another realm completely.

[Jungle Fire](#)...the name says it all because they always bring the tropical heat of their Afro-Latin funk and soul. The instrumental ensemble with percussion front and center is always on point with their pulsing rhythms and are completely irresistible, especially when each player takes turns jamming out.

This was the first time I heard [Mark De Clive-Lowe](#) and his band in an outdoor setting and it lent an even bigger atmosphere to the experience of listening and absorbing his rich electronic jazz and dance music. He opened with

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech playing over hypnotic beats and his lovely talented wife, singer [Nia Andrews](#), joined on a few songs that were incredible.



Photo by Carlos Garcia, courtesy of by ERMF

I was passing out flyers there for [Common Culture: Across the Water](#), a show featuring Jungle Fire, Mark De Clive-Lowe and Nia Andrews and was happy to see many of the festival-goers were vibing out to these musicians for the first time. That's the beauty of festivals like Eagle Rock Music Festival, bringing different communities of folks together to experience something new and discover new music. I got a chance to speak to Matthew Himes, ERMF Festival Director and Events Director at [Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock \(CFAER\)](#), the nonprofit cultural arts center which produces the yearly event.

EnClave.LA: Amazing festival! What were your highlights for what went well and what do you want to do better next year?

MH: *We presented the rich world music culture that make up the local communities of North East Los Angeles. It was all so exciting to discover new talent and present it on our locals stage. We were proud that the cultural mix represented the diverse cultures of our communities. We would like to expand the visual arts portion of the festival to give the talented artists of North East Los Angeles a platform.*

EnClave.LA: It's been a sort of reboot of ERMF with it not happening last year and then returning in August instead of its traditional October date. Was that intentional and will it be a summer festival instead of a fall festival from now on?

MH: *We love the summer vibe and the community seems to enjoy it as well. Ultimately it's about coming together with the community members, bands and artists that will best represent North East Los Angeles.*

EnClave.LA: Besides the Eagle Rock Music Festival, a lot of people may not be familiar with what Center for the Arts, Eagle Rock does the rest of the year. What's next for CFAER and what should people look forward to?

MH: *We are really excited that this year's festival was a great launching pad for our monthly locals night where we will showcase the musicians and bands who wanted to play the festival but we did not have to room to program them, so we can continue to have eclectic programming everyone saw at the festival. We want to invite the community in to listen to great music, dance and have fun.*



CFAER Imagine Studio



We are also really proud to be staging a children's arts exhibition featuring the young emerging artists from after school arts enrichment program, Imagine Studio. At Imagine Studio, we provide free art classes taught by working contemporary artists at elementary and middle schools through out North East Los Angeles, particularly to

students who are under-served and at risk. We also have a marvelous show coming up called [Trova Con Mujeres](#) [Friday, September 9] which is part of our monthly showcase of Noches de Trova.

EnClave.LA: Is it a challenge to keep this festival free for folks and what do the donations support?

MH: Yes, when you think of all the logistics involved in producing a festival of this size, there are permits, safety protocols and personnel, infrastructure, crews and talent to name a few of the costs involved. The donations are suggested only. We are grateful for the support we receive for our after-school arts program, Imagine Studio. To see a child discover their own creativity makes it all worth while. We invite everyone who attended the festival to come to a concert at the center, take a workshop, become a supporter and join the Center for the Arts Eagle Rock family.



CFAER Imagine Studio