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Music by the Sea: Wickerpark Interview

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Wickerpark is a music festival that has established itself in Lebanon for 7 years now. The festival is rather an ecosystem that has branched out around music. Hosting mainly underground and emerging artists, Wickerpark has become a landmark event marking the end of the summer. Even more so, the festival proclaims its involvement with social and environmental issues offering a space to discuss and promote a series of relevant topics. The festival proves that art does not exist in a bubble, it rather thrives on questions raised in the community. We caught up with the festival's director George Daou to learn more about this year's edition, here's how it went:

1. Wickerpark is a unique festival that pays tribute to alternative musicians in the region and has been taking place every year since 2011 in Batroun, North of Lebanon. Can you tell us first about how the original idea was conceived?

Prior to 2011, there weren't many festivals to support local, alternative musicians. So the idea came naturally since we had a number of musician friends and a large piece of land just next to our family house in Batroun. What pushed us further to do it is the conviction that young Lebanese artists have such strong appetites for expressing themselves and are capable of doing so when given the space.

2. Wickerpark is involved with social, economic and environmental issues. Tell us more about these initiatives and why you think they're relevant to you as music festival organizers.

We believe that we have a certain degree of responsibility towards the community, so we reach out to ngos to be present at the venue to raise awareness and communicate with our audience any messages they want to deliver that deal with different problems in the country, which the government is failing to address. On another hand, we're a zero waste festival, our posters and flyers are wood free and our cups are made of recycled cardboard. In previous years we've worked with Lebanon Green Again on their national helicopter seeding campaign and research on marine species that improve water quality such as sea sponges.

3. Wickerpark's line-up often creates a balance between emerging artists and more established ones. How do you go about choosing the line-up? What are your most important criteria in making these choices?

Our priority is to have someone local with a new sound, whether they're established or not. When it comes to the lineup curation, we try to have a wide range of genres. It's a very tricky process, finding the right balance between genres and originality.

4. Delivering quality sound at a venue like yours can be challenging. How do you make sure that the artists' work reaches the audience as intended?

It's challenging, you always have problems that you can't anticipate, trying our best to have the right technical team. We usually work with Tuneforks studios, and this year we are working with 21db as the acoustics and audio consultants of the festival. 21dB will be tuning the sound system to ensure the highest audio quality is delivered as well as ensure that the sound levels are well monitored and are in line with the musical content and flow throughout the event. We're also working with Loud N Clear as sound providers. Needless to say, they're the best in the country.

5. You've been organizing the festival for a couple of years now. How has your approach to working on the festival changed with experience?

There are things that are kind of easier to do every year, yet every edition has its challenges, especially in Lebanon, ranging from internal factors (exp: members of the team who can't make it since they no longer live in the country) or even outside factors: political, environmental and weather conditions that can make the festival very tough.

6. You're in direct contact with the underground music scene. How do you see the impact of Wickerpark on said scene and how do you think it has changed over the years?

We think of Wickerpark as cultural resistance. As far as the impact, we just worry about keeping the festival true to its values, whether it is the bands we are working with, our collaborators etc hoping that will have a positive impact on our audience.

7. The venue has become part of the festival's identity. Tell us about the role this space plays on the overall outcome of your effort.

The venue is a vital part of the festival. It was one of the main reasons which made us start the festival in the first place. Overlooking the Mediterranean, right next to the house some of us grew up in, the space has provided festival participants and friends with a sort of refuge throughout the years. This in itself has nourished a sense of comradery, which we believe gives the festival its family spirit.



8. Tell us about the off-festival activities you've planned during the festival weekend.

We have many activities happening throughout the weekend, ranging from a night with glitter on Friday to another event that we are preparing in our camping area (Ô Glacée) on Sunday. People can see all the details on our website or the Facebook page.

9. What are some of the challenges that face you as independent festival organizers in Lebanon?

We face many challenges every year, most of which relate to securing the funding necessary to deliver a proper festival experience. In addition to the political climate of the country, which leaves some international artists to be reluctant to perform in Lebanon, add to it the lack of government support.

10. With that context, how do you see the future of Wickerpark? What do you see yourself doing differently in the coming years?

The festival definitely could use more funding to reach the level that it needs to be at. Where we will be next year will depend on whether we feel that the year-round time, effort and love that many people continue to put into the festival can sustain itself.