

Robert Parker, Wine Advocate

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For the last couple of years, I've covered "Live in the Vineyard," a typically private music festival that descends upon the Napa Valley every autumn, delivering a trinity of hedonistic delights—great food, memorable wines and chart-topping music—to guests from around the nation over the course of a long, four-day weekend. And, for the past couple of years, consumers couldn't buy tickets to LITV; they could only win them in sweepstakes competitions held by the event's various sponsors. The balance of the audience is made up of music industry executives and radio programmers from around the nation there to preview the work of up-and-coming artists, or new releases by more established ones.

This year, however, following the devastating wildfires in Northern California, LITV, in partnership with Blue Note Napa, hosted a special benefit unplugged acoustic concert at the Margrit Mondavi Theatre in downtown Napa on November 3.

The public was able to purchase tickets at \$ 50.00 per person, and enjoy an evening of Napa Valley wines while listening to The All-American Rejects, LeAnn Rimes, Ocean Park Standoff, AJR, ZZ Ward, Alex Gaskarth from All Time Low, Welshly Arms and Keelan Donovan. The artists gave generously of their time, performing to a full house of mostly local Napa residents, seemingly eager to have something to celebrate. Artist Keelan Donovan, whose hits include "Love of Mine" and "In Arms Reach," added that, "it was an honor to be in Northern California sharing love through music at LITV. Even in the wake of tragedy, the Napa community was incredibly warm and full-hearted. I came not knowing what to expect, and I left #NapaStrong."

Net proceeds raised at the event were donated to the Redwood Credit Union's North Bay Fire Relief Fund. Created by RCU Community Fund, Inc. in partnership with Redwood Credit Union, The Press Democrat and Senator Mike McGuire, the North Bay Fire Relief fund supports the immediate needs of community members most impacted by the North Bay fires, including fire victims in the four counties affected—Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, and Lake—who have lost homes.

Frankly, for a while leading up to LITV, I wondered if the event would even go on following such devastation and loss. Would anyone even be in the mood to celebrate live music joyfully in the wake of this tragedy? I grew up on a small farmstead off of the Silverado Trail, one of the major country roads spanning the length of the 30-mile-long Napa Valley appellation. My parents were evacuated for a week from this same little farm, but it was randomly spared. Some of their neighbors were not so fortunate. Signerello Winery, not even a mile from their place, is a charred, skeletal reminder of the Atlas Peak Fire's seemingly relentless destruction. But LITV CEO, Bobbii Hach-Jacobs, was very clear on why the show—as they say—had to go on. "When I heard about the wildfires, I was heartbroken for all of those affected and those doing everything they could to combat fires that were out of control. After checking in with all the sponsors and the winemaking community, who were all so devastated, I knew that there was no question about hosting LITV; we were going to show up and prove just how strong Napa is. We wanted to help bring back tourism and assist in the rebuild right away. Napa Valley has supported us so much for nearly a decade. It was our turn to do the same in a big way."

HAIM was one of the headlining bands performing at this year's Live In the Vineyard. Photo by PHOCO. In addition to LITV having also donated the proceeds of their weekend's "Napa Strong" merchandise, one of the private concerts spontaneously erupted into a frenzied round of donations from audience members. The dramatic moment began when an audience guest approached the stage and announced he was donating \$5,000.00 to the North Bay Fire Relief Fund because he was so moved by the evening's performers, which

included Magic Giant, Ocean Park Standoff, The Revivalists, Sara Evans, ZZ Ward, Flagship, the All American Rejects and a number of other highly-engaging musical acts. In fairly quick succession, seven other participants in the audience approached the stage to match his donation. “We were so impressed with how LITV brought the community together and expanded their event to include raising money to help the Napa area,” says Zang of Magic Giant, a trio of free-spirited musicians who were heavily influenced by The Grateful Dead, and who delivered a powerful, rousing set. Members Austin Bisnow, Zambricki Li and Zang had a full house on their feet from the moment they started. “The resilience and spirit of the people of Napa really shone through, and was a true balance against the stark damages the area has endured. We have partnered with an organization called One Tree Planted—for every physical album sold, we plant a tree. We are planting our next batch of trees in California, and are so happy to be a part of an event that cares about community as much as we do,” he continues.

Founded in 2008, LITV partners with various Napa Valley wineries that provide their cellars and tasting rooms as venues for the visiting artists. Throughout the four-day festival, other artists participating in LITV included Sara Evans, Fergie, HAIM, Julia Michaels, ZZ Ward, Hunter Hayes, Eric Paslay, Lindsay Ell, David Shaw and Zack Feinberg of The Revivalists, JOSEPH, Dave Barnes, Flagship, Noah Kahan and Temecula Road, among others. Guests, who came from around the nation, utilized spare time between concerts to visit local wineries, restaurants and other points of interest. Michelle Whetstone, of Whetstone Wine Cellars, said, “It was great to see the hotels full, the streets bustling and the restaurants packed.”

A number of artists with whom I spoke expressed a hope that music might bring even a small sense of healing to this community. “Honestly, this is going to sound really cheesy, but the way I heal is through music,” said artist Julia Michaels, whose current EP *Nervous System* features her break-out hit “Issues.” “It’s always been the kind of thing that has healed me, and that I’ve seen heal others,” she continued. “Music is so powerful. It has the ability to change somebody’s mood. It can make someone who is going through heartbreak laugh, and want to drink, dance and have the best time of their lives. It can change everything for people’s minds at times. Music is a major source of healing in my life.”

Country music artist Sara Evans, who will be performing in this year’s Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, was a highlight for festival-goers. Evans’ latest hit is the folksy “Words,” from her eponymously-titled, genre-bending album. Evans’ performance, which moved effortlessly between pop, country, folk and the blues, appealed to a visibly-moved audience which demonstrated its approval with numerous standing ovations. “I truly love Napa Valley wines,” she told me. “It broke my heart when I saw the fires devastating the area, but I was so relieved when we pulled into the Napa Valley to see that it was open for business. What an awesome testament to the resiliency of the people that live and work here! I can’t wait to come back soon and spend some more time enjoying the scenery, people and wine.”

And indeed, while there is still a staggering amount of rebuilding to be done in all of the communities effected, it’s easy to forget that Sonoma, Santa Rosa and Napa are large areas. Santa Rosa, for example, was perhaps hardest hit, losing entire neighborhoods so quickly that the breadth of destruction was nearly too surreal to fathom. Yet in other still-vibrant pockets of this sprawling Northern California city, businesses that depend upon tourism dollars to sustain them are eager to receive customers anew.

One morning, on my way to Napa’s Regusci Winery to watch country music’s latest guitar playing phenomenon Lindsay Ell perform (shred, that is), I couldn’t help but stare at the mountainsides blackened by the Altas Peak fires. The groves of manzanitas, forests of oak trees and large swaths of chaparral that I used to hike as a kid nearly every weekend now looked like the surface of some arid, unfamiliar planet. But a vibrant, multi-colored bed of wild flowers, lining the Silverado Trail corridor between Chimney Rock Winery and Regusci Winery, was an affirming reminder of the powers of rebirth, among all species, including our own. By the time I arrived at Regusci Winery, I had a bit of a skip in my step for the first time since before the fires. The parking lot was bustling with non-festival goers and concert guests alike, and

later that evening, the Regusci Family was hosting 500 wine club members from throughout California for their annual post-harvest party.

Suzanne Phifer-Pavitt, owner of Phifer Pavitt Vineyards in Calistoga, opened her winery doors to a number of artists, including Ohio-natives Welshly Arms, whose hit song “Legendary” seemed to floor even the most seasoned music industry executives with its Howlin’ Wolf-inspired, bluesy Cleveland sound. Julia Michaels, along with legendary guitarist Dan Kanter, delivered a hauntingly delicate yet bold set of acoustic performances. Between artist’s sets, Phifer-Pavitt took to the mike to explain how she and her family were impacted by the fires. “The devastation caused by the wildfires greatly affected both our Napa Valley and Sonoma family and friends. We call the Napa Valley home, but our second ‘home’ is Sonoma County, where our sons attend Cardinal Newman High School and play sports. So many of our friends, many of which are part of the football program, lost everything, and our boys, along with 600 other students, lost their High School. I want to help spread the word that although the Wine Country may be bruised, we are not broken, and that is why I agreed to participate in the LITV music event. Singers, songwriters and winemakers are kindred spirits, each artist telling a story through their craft. What better way to start the healing process than to enjoy beautiful wines while listening to amazing music on a picture-perfect fall afternoon in the Napa Valley. Music heals the soul.”

The sentiment that music heals was consistent throughout the four-day sensory feast. “Especially now, after the fires, the music helped us all heal as music does for each of us in our own way,” said Ellie Anest of Eleven Eleven Winery Partners. The understated artist Drake Margolnick, lead singer of Flagship, who was last in the area for the Bottle Rock music festival a few years back, said, “Napa is beautiful, and we are glad to be back in the area. It was tough knowing how much destruction and loss the community had been hit with, but all of the locals we met were very nice and seemed to be quite resilient. It was a good time, with good people, and good wine.”

To learn how you can donate to the North Bay Fire Relief Fund, please visit their website. LITV will be returning to the Napa Valley on March 15-18 with Yountville Live, where members of the public may attend by purchasing advance tickets here.