

TELLURIDE BLUES & BREWS

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Last week my band, The Kirk James Blues Band, played up in the chic town of Telluride during their annual Blues & Brews Festival. After a scenic drive through Southwestern Colorado, I arrived at my destination to be greeted by hordes of festies and a huge traffic jam.

The first order of business was to load in my drum set at the Floradora Saloon right on the main thoroughfare of Colorado street. After circling the area four or five times like a hungry buzzard I decided to double park. Any working musician in this town last weekend was treated like royalty. Lots of nice folks offered to help me with my drums – I accepted! These people all thought I looked like a famous drummer; they couldn't put their finger on it, but they knew I had to be somebody famous. I let them think what they would and got unloaded in record time.

I went back out into the mass of humanity in search of our \$145.00 a night room. (Cheap in Telluride terms.) Finally, I found the Mountainside Inn on the other side of the river. Of course there was no room at the inn – for parking. I finally found a coveted spot three blocks away. I squeezed my truck in behind a gigantic RV and there it remained the whole weekend.

Now I was on foot. It was like falling into a roaring river and being swept unmercifully downstream. The current of festival-goers was headed to the main stage on the east side of town. Once in a while I came up for air. At last, I waded out of the crowd and started admiring the town. Lots of cute gingerbread houses lined the streets below the walls of 12,000-foot mountains that ring the town. Each cottage was meticulously restored to its Victorian splendor. Back in the late nineteenth century you could built one of these houses for under a thousand bucks. Now if you were to purchase one you would have to dig deeply into your cash purse and then some!

I was admiring one little home and had the overwhelming urge to peek into the front window. I held back when I recalled the ancient adobe house where Jayebird and I lived in Old Town Albuquerque thirty years ago. One evening she and I were eating dinner under our candle-lit chandelier. Suddenly a couple of garish tourists peeked in the big arched window and stared at us. They must have thought that we were part of an historical display or something. They were commenting to one another how lifelike we looked. Jaye and I motioned for them to leave us alone with our middle fingers. No, I would not be looking into these little houses because living and breathing rich people live there.

As I made my way back to the club, I walked by dozens of ratty looking guitar players strumming at full tilt boogie with their stoned-out harp-playing friends; and lots of dread-locked ragamuffins busting-a-move in the streets. Up on Colorado Street I encountered a sight that I will not soon forget. There on the sidewalk, coming right at me, was a squirely looking little man parading his mangy dog. Balanced on the dog was a black cat and atop the cat were two pet mice. The guy had a can and was taking donations. I guess he felt that this was so weird and entertaining that people should pay to see him walk down the street. For some unknown reason he came right up to me and greeted me as if I were a long-lost friend. He told me he was cashing in that day and asked me where I was playing. I lied and told him I was playing at the Sheridan down the street and he promised he'd come up and see the band. I bid him adieu.

I was feeling the magic that is Telluride – a college town in search of a college. The sheer beauty of the place had put me in a trance. I understand that some tourists in Europe visit ancient sites or famous art museums and become dumbfounded. Some hyperventilate and faint amidst the grandeur of it all. There is an actual medical term for this. I should confer with Dr. Wienpahl to see if I was suffering the effects of this malady.

The weather was wonderful and the people were friendly, despite the occasional fistfights and shootings over parking spaces. The majestic granite mountains loomed like royalty over their humble subjects. And I don't think I have seen so many beautiful young women in one locale in quite a long time! They were all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed strutting their stuff. This added

sexuality increased the excitement of the fair-like atmosphere. I felt glad to be alive and to be a part of this happy little section of humanity right in the middle of God's Country.

For two nights I got to play for a captive audience at the Floradora. Bob Hemenger sat in with us both nights and sounded like a sax god. He played his tenor through an echo device that made the whole thing sound spectacular. His brilliant notes seemed to reverberate from the surrounding cliffs. He was this large, happy siren wailing for and hypnotizing unsuspecting souls who would crash into the rocks around his feet. They gladly went down in a sea of alcohol with smiles on their faces, three sheets to the wind.

John the bass player and I were set up in the front bay window. Not only was I playing for the crowd inside, but also entertaining the crush of party-goers outside the club. Lots of friends whom I hadn't seen in years waved at me and I smiled back. An old friend presented herself and took the band to her condo for break. The apartments were a mere two doors down and rested on the top two floors of an ancient edifice. She was a rich chick – real good lookin' of course! We went out on the top balcony and watched the festivities below as others frolicked in the hot tub in the sky. It was magical.

The next day Bob procured us some backstage passes compliments of Los Lobos. Now we could rub shoulders with the real stars of the festival. Little angel-faced Hannah, in her tie-dyed shirt, danced wildly on their blanket out in the crowd while Little Feat busted loose on stage. Later, on the way back to my room on the river to prepare for the gig, I walked the quaint streets and watched the yellow moon rise over the peaks as the strains of "Dixie Chicken" reverberated through the valley.

I came to a stop right in front of the gondola station and looked up the mountain at the string of gondolas rocking in the moonlight. I had to take a ride. Watching the quaint, lit-up town of Telluride become smaller and smaller was almost as if I died on a chariot to heaven. I suddenly became melancholy. As I got closer to the stars, I began to ponder . . .

I thought of my sweet wife and all the wonderful friends I have back in Pagosa. A surge of serenity enveloped me as I ascended. I thanked God for the opportunities of playing with my beloved band-mates, for this mountain life that I live, and for the wonderful spectacle that was before me. It doesn't get much better than this. I thought about how we all have to respect Mother Nature and watch after the Hannahs of the world. I also prayed to God that the parking problem in Pagosa Springs never reaches this unimaginable and ghastly proportion!