

PORTLAND

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ACTIVITIES / SUMMER FUN / AUGUST 6, 2015

Dispatch from Pickathon



Pickathon bills itself as a family friendly music festival where kids have ample opportunity for accessing a “summer’s camp worth of activities” during the festival. My family and I thought we would check out Pickathon since it’s a short drive from our house in Portland and what else would be more fun than live music and fun for our three-year-old.

Pickathon is manageable for families since there is a limit of only 3500 attendees. Many of who have their kids in tow. The kids help chill out the attendees so the festival doesn’t end up feeling like one big party scene of recent college grads, in part because kids under twelve do have the run of the farm and get into the festival for free. And that’s a good thing since weekend passes cost a massive \$270. I spoke to one long-time Pickathon goer and she said the

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organizers polled the regular attendees several years ago and the overwhelming majority was willing to pay more to keep the festival small. There is an intimate feeling to the experience, which many feel is worth paying for.

The festival is indeed, a child wonderland. Immediately upon our arrival we discovered The Big Top tent, filled with circus games with Circus Cascadia. We juggled and fell off stilts and rode



on balance boards and created some general chaos. We made sunglasses, ate s'mores and lounged in hammocks at the REI tent. We climbed a tree fort and looked over the awesome tent sky structure that created the most glorious shade over the main stages. We returned again and again to The Big Top Tent to hear kid-centered bands of Mr. Ben and Red Yarn. Both performers were wonderfully engaging. In fact, it might have been the only hour of the day when our son sat still. The animal puppets that talked to the audience and roaring like a bear helped keep him listening.

Even though Pickathon did everything possible to entertain our little guy, he had a rough time on our first day. Maybe because of the over 100-degree heat, maybe because he refused to eat anything but ice cream and a few bites of mac and cheese (I know, not winning mother of the year) maybe because the only nap he had was 20 minutes in my arms in a sweaty embrace. He was cranky and whinny most of the day and was not very interested in listening to music that didn't include sing-a-longs and animal noises. No matter how well organized or kid friendly the event is, if *your* kid is having a bad day, then *you* are going to have a bad day too.

We braved the thinning crowds on Sunday afternoon to see if we could feel some of the Pickathon magic. With a little negotiation, a well timed ice cream cone, twenty degree cooler weather and letting go of any of my expectations to actually hear the music, I learned what keeps bringing people back to Pickathon year after year. I did manage to experience some great music from the well-curated and somewhat obscure offerings. The twilight show we

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caught while lounging in a hammock surrounded by trees in the Woods stage, my little one nestled beside me, gently swinging in rhythm to an amazing band. That set made up for all the crankiness of the day before and then some.

Next time we will go with friends so the kids can run around together and the adults can divide and conquer. Or spend half a day for several days in a row, rather than trying to cram it all in on one day. Better yet, maybe we will wait until our son is a bit older, like the sweet spot of being 8-12 years old, big enough to appreciate all the activities and maybe some of the music and young enough to still get in for free.



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