

Fever pitch

First-day acts light it up at country-music festival

By JOHN WOOLEY
World Scene Writer

Carrie Underwood was — and justifiably so — the high-profile Oklahoman triumphantly returning to her home state to take the stage at the Country Fever festival. But she wasn't the only Oklahoma artist to play the massive outdoor event Thursday.

She wasn't even the only act from Checotah. That distinction also went to Diamondback, a six-man band with a strong family component that boasted two members from Underwood's hometown.

Diamondback was the first band to play at this year's event, held four miles north of Pryor just off U.S. 69. The group began at 2:30 p.m., while hardy young female arrivals were still slathering suntan lotion on each others' backs and others were staking out portable chairs in the vast general-admission area surrounding the rim of the sunken reserved section.

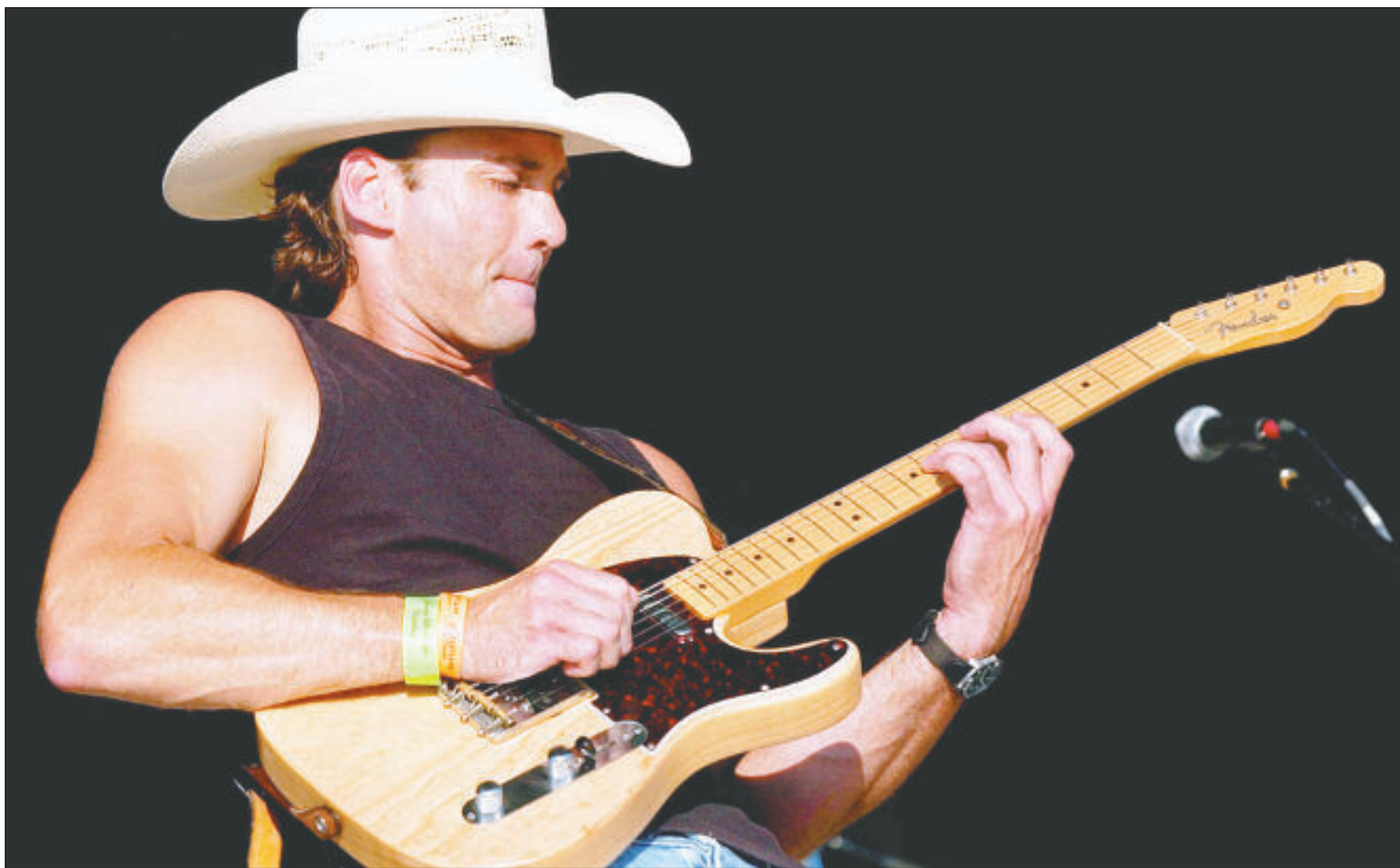
If you forgot to bring a chair, you could buy one from the Chair in a Bag booth, located on the path from the front gate to the stage. You could also get your ears pierced, ride a camel at Safari Joe's tent, take a run through the Jurassic Survivor obstacle course, play the Oklahoma Lottery or eat a Fresh Hot Churro, among many other things.

You could even get free Cisco Systems wi-fi all over the grounds — for the first time ever at an outdoor music festival in Oklahoma. That's according to Matthew Matlack, whose Pryor-based company, DTS Communications, supplied the service in conjunction with Country Fever.

Once you got to the stage area, you could also get some pretty interesting stuff. Diamondback, for instance, boasted a banjo player whose picking could be heard on versions of everything from Alan Jackson's "Don't Rock the Jukebox" to the Jimmy Reed blues classic "Baby What You Want Me to Do," with the '70s Norman Greenbaum pop hit "Spirit in the Sky" thrown in for good measure. This is obviously one of those bands that's worked so long and honed its chops so well that it's not afraid to tackle anything.

The same could be said for Darrel Cole and his three-man band Transcontinental, a razor-sharp local outfit combining the powerful vocals of Cole with tight ensemble work to create a classic outlaw-country sound.

One highlight of the set was a Waylon-esque original, "What It Takes to Make a Man an Outlaw." Another was the introduction of 7-year-old guitarist Wildcat Wilson (his real name), who hit the stage decked out in cowboy duds to hit a few licks with the boys on "Sweet Home Alabama."



STEPHEN HOLMAN/Tulsa World

Wade Hayes is in peak form for his set Thursday night at the Country Fever festival. The event runs through Sunday.

concert review COUNTRY FEVER FESTIVAL

Trent Willmon may not be a household name — his best-known single, 2004's "Beer Man," peaked at No. 30 on the Billboard country chart — but he and his five-man band put on a fine show, featuring well-executed original tunes.

Many of those came from his current album, "A Little More Livin'," and they ranged from the party-on, pedal-down abandon of "Good One Comin' On" to the Stevie Ray Vaughan-style blues number "Louisiana Rain." His "Ropin' Pen," with its laid-back delivery and loping beat, sounded like something Jimmy Buffett might've written if he'd been a rodeo rider.

Willmon also had a candidate for best line of the night when he talked about being from West Texas, "which is so flat you can watch a dog run away all day."

Willmon's pal and fellow singer-songwriter Wade Hayes, from Bethel

Acres, came on next. After a few years away from the spotlight, Hayes is poised for a major comeback, and his concert Thursday showed that he hasn't lost a thing.

Playing with Willmon's band, Hayes tore through a set of his late-'90s hits, encompassing numbers such as "On A Good Night," "The Day That She Left Tulsa (in a Chevy)" and the chart-topping "Old Enough to Know Better." He also did a couple of near-misses, including the rocking "Tore Up (from the Floor Up)" and his remake of Glen Campbell's "Wichita Lineman," which should've been a big radio song.

Hayes also showed his longtime affinity for classic Western swing ("Take Me Back to Tulsa") and honky-tonk ("Whiskey River"). A new song, "Good Day to Go Crazy," added rock to the honky-tonk, and another fresh one, "She Knows Me," with the added line "but she loves me anyway," was a standout ballad that had a lot of men in the crowd nodding their heads in agreement.

Underwood's show was covered in

some detail in Friday's World, and that coverage included the observation that the show was more pop than country, which certainly doesn't mean anything bad. On the contrary, it was visually appealing and musically exciting, perhaps reaching a crescendo when Underwood and her six-man band (keyboard and fiddle, no steel guitar) and female backup singer tore through a couple of numbers from the late-'80s repertoire of Guns N' Roses.

Introducing them as "two rock songs from a band I love," she began by sitting on a stool strumming a guitar and singing "Patience," escalating into her strutting across the stage with a scarf-bedecked microphone stand and joyfully shouting the lyrics to "Sweet Child O'Mine" while the band blasted away and a wah-wah guitar lead soared above the rhythm. It was something.

Otherwise, Underwood hewed fairly close to material from her first album, including "Inside Your Heaven," the disc's bonus track and one familiar to "American Idol" fans.

"You may have heard me sing this when I won 'American Idol,'" she said, sitting down and taking up a guitar. "Fireworks were going off and I was crying and everything. Hopefully, I'll do better this time."

The only fireworks this time came from the stage. And she didn't cry.

The veteran band Sawyer Brown — has it really been 23 years since the group won on "Star Search," a predecessor of "American Idol"? — had the unenviable position of following Underwood onto the stage. The five-man band, augmented as always by an extra multi-instrumentalist, was up to the task, though.

Sawyer Brown is that rare bird in contemporary country music — an act that maintains a strong fan base and big-star status without being a presence on the charts. The outfit hasn't had a Top 10 hit since 1998's "Drive Me Wild." Still, it not only survives, but also prospers for a couple of reasons — its two decades of hit-

SEE FEVER D-8

This big man is money on local rap scene

By MATT GLEASON
World Scene Writer

At 6-foot-6 and weighing in at 300-plus pounds, Tim Henderson, aka Takin In \$\$\$, is, as he said, "one hell of a mountain climb."

He not only draws comparisons to the late gangsta rap icon Notorious B.I.G. for his heft, but also for his husky, baritone delivery that booms over a hopping, club-friendly cut such as "Hate This Pimpin'."

"This is the club banger," the 30-year-old local rapper said about the track featuring JB Smoove and Yung Vilin. "Everyone loves this in the club."

With tracks like "Hate This Pimpin'" and others, Henderson's latest effort, "Ghetto Soprano" — the title is a nod to fictional mob boss Tony Soprano — finds the big man speaking his mind about grinding it out for love and, of course, \$\$\$.

Four of the tracks — "Hate This Pimpin'," "Opportunity Knocks," "Makin Moves" and "Trust Nobody" — can be heard online at www.myspace.com/takinin.

"Opportunity Knocks" is one of two tracks off Henderson's 1999 debut release, but Henderson simply had to remaster "Opportunity Knocks" for "Ghetto Soprano."

How could he not include the track recorded in P. Diddy's Daddy's House Recording Studio in Manhattan, and executive-produced by SWV singer LeeAnn Lyons, aka Lili?

preview

TAKIN IN \$\$\$ WITH FULL FLAVA KINGS

When:
10 p.m. Sunday

Where:
Sax, 18th Street and Boston Avenue

Admission:
\$7-\$10

"It's the track that defines me," Henderson said. "When cats listen to this, they can hear me at my rawest — at my grimmest. This is my hungriest moment, you know what I'm saying? I ain't got to be hungry now because I already know the path in which Takin In \$\$\$ wants to go."

"You know, a lot of people have a negative view of rap," he continued. "They see rappers as 'Oh my god, here come these brothers with the baggy pants.' My mom don't even allow me to roll in no baggy pants. I ain't hangin' out on street corners doing what I have no business doing. I'm a guy with a regular job every day."

On the track "Conspiracy," which features the rhymes of Kwame & Creal of Medu Net, plus the powerhouse R&B singer Rochelle Chambers, Henderson raps about his need for respect.

"It's a conspiracy how cats don't want to give me respect," Henderson said, "so everybody who came on this rap had to talk about being disrespected."

Speaking of disrespect, in the "Ghetto Soprano" liner notes, Henderson blasts his naysayers.

"No matter what may be said about me, I have a happy home in which I'm never alone in person or by phone," wrote the newly divorced, single father of two, "because to hate me is not to love yourself."

On a brighter note, Henderson also thanked a slew of people in the liner notes, most notably his mother Dorothy and his father, City Councilor Jack Henderson.

In the musical homage to his mother, aptly titled "Momma," the rapper, who refrains from rapping about violence in his raps, reveals the big heart beneath his hulking physique.

He bolsters the emotional track with R&B singer Toland Knox's moving, stratospheric falsetto vocals.

"When I did this track, you know, a lot of rappers were coming out with tracks talking about being a good father figure," he said, "but I think it all starts with your moms."

"My mom is my best friend. I look at my dad and my brother as my role models, but my mom is really my best friend."

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STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World

Tim Henderson, aka Takin In \$\$\$, will perform cuts from his newest CD on Sunday night at Sax.