

# Band competition reveals depth of Oklahoma's musical talent

The Oklahoma Heritage Association's "battle of the bands" last weekend forced me to re-evaluate many of my preconceived notions of such contests. This was a competition in which all six acts offered compelling musical arguments for winning the battle, and it reinvigorated my enthusiasm for the striking degree of local talent performing at Oklahoma City-area clubs.

I helped judge the competition with **Daniel Lapham** from the El Reno Tribune, "Buzz Born and Bred" host **Lacey Lett** from 94.7 FM "The Buzz," KJ-103 "Slow Jams" host **Brad B**, and **Brent Weber** from Fox 25. Like any outdoor event scheduled for late March, the battle of the bands, which was held on the grounds of the Oklahoma Heritage Museum, 1400 N Classen, was subject to the cruel vicissitudes of Oklahoma weather — any hope for the groups having a chance to warm up was quelled by the harsh chill blowing through Midtown. But none of the musicians, most of whom were in their teens or early 20s, seemed daunted by the conditions.

Edmond singer-songwriter **Ian Van Woods** was first up with his impressive vocal range and an idiosyncratic performance and songwriting style. Van Woods performed songs such as "Someone" and "Noir" on solo keyboard, and showed genuine promise as a distinctive performer with a dark vision who, with more cultivation and a band of like-minded mates, could become Oklahoma's own teenage **Nick Cave**.

**The Transit Message** played four songs of well-crafted alt-rock with strong leads and real enthusiasm. Songs such as "The 'If' in Your Life" resonated with the audience and showed that this six-piece Edmond band, which will compete in the Bishop McGuinness battle of the bands later this month, is one to watch.

Then **Amorda** took the stage, and the audience got to witness a 1-year-old band that sounded as if it had been rocking for years. Guitarists/vocalists **Jon Perleda** and **Cody Greenwood** ably traded leads and harmonized, and the entire band looked and sounded completely confident deploying their hard-edged

emo songs such as "Evalinda" and "See Me Through." Amorda performs Saturday at the Bricktown Ballroom, and will compete in another battle of the bands April 18 at Putnam City High School.

**Forevermore** was also impressive with its more subtle but still powerful approach to alternative rock, and singer **Collin Low** and the rest of the band connected well with the audience. The next group, **Hollow**, is a familiar presence in local competitions — the band led by singers **Katy Carris** and **Alana Warfel** won a previous competition to open for **Bon Jovi** two years ago. The group's polished hard rock with pristine harmonies on "Won't Be Missing You" and three

other songs showed that their previous win was no fluke, and the band truly energized a cold but enthusiastic crowd.

The evening closed with Edmond's **They Drive By Night**, the band that had the most original and ultimately promising sound of the evening. Although the group was plagued by technical issues, including the sudden death of a keyboard, I sincerely hope this band stays with it. They Drive By Night lists one of its key influences as **Radiohead**, though the singer's high-pitched vocals were reminiscent of **Placebo's Brian Molko**, and that made for a refreshing combination, despite the group's difficulties that evening.

In the end, **Hollow** won the competition in a close race, followed by Amorda and **The Transit Message**. When I say it was close, I am not just being charitable — it came down to fairly lengthy deliberations — but **Hollow** ultimately delivered with its melodic hard rock and spirited live performance, and deserved our panel's highest honor.

I have judged battles of the bands in the past, and it is not always a great experience. When the bands come armed with well-trodden warhorses, the sheer pain of enduring yet another **Foghat** cover can be unbearable.

The Oklahoma Heritage Association's battle proved that such contests can be populated with great talent, and it was a strong reflection on the quality of central Oklahoma's talent pool.



**GEORGE LANG**  
STATIC