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Reel Big Fish and N.A.R.P. perform in honor of Daniel Pearl Music Days

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Kevin Dickel

The crowd was losing its mind and having nothing but a good time as Reel Big Fish and special guest N.A.R.P. took the stage in Commonwealth Ballroom in Squires Student Center Wednesday night.

Reel Big Fish takes ska-punk to a new level, touring non-stop around the world and playing over 250 shows a year. However, this is the band's first stop in Blacksburg.

"I did a little driving, before we sound-checked, into the valley," said John Christianson, on trumpet and vocals for the band. "It was gorgeous to see all of the broken down, 150-year-old houses."

N.A.R.P., on the other hand, is from Blacksburg. They are used to playing small shows downtown, but with more than 575 tickets pre-sold, Wednesday's crowd was their largest ever.

"We've never played in a room that large," said Dan Linden, drummer for N.A.R.P. "We're excited to open for a band that has truly withstood the test of time."

N.A.R.P. opened with 40 minutes of high energy "bluz funk" that got crowds bobbing heads, jumping and even singing along to a cover of "Ain't No Sunshine."

Members of Reel Big Fish were spotted backstage dancing along to the funk jam blaring out of the speakers.

The crowd anxiously waited for Reel Big Fish to take the stage after the opener, and the band was just as excited.

“It’s all about having a good time,” Christianson said. “We want everyone to laugh and dance.”

Billy Kottage, trombone player for Reel Big Fish, said they were expecting a crazy crowd, and Tech seemed to deliver.

“We are so fortunate that when people come to a Reel Big Fish show, everybody knows what we do, and it’s all about having fun,” Christianson said.

Hillel at Virginia Tech and the Jewish Student Union (JSU) invited the bands to play as part of an entire week of events in honor of Daniel Pearl Music Days.

"By a unanimous vote, we decided they would be a good, popular band for Daniel Pearl Music Day," said Susan Kurtz, the executive director of Hillel.

Daniel Pearl, a violinist and journalist for The Wall Street Journal, was killed in 2002 in Pakistan while on assignment.

Pearl's parents founded an organization dedicated to cross-cultural understanding through forms of communication about which Pearl was passionate, including music and journalism.

"His legacy (is) bringing different people together and reporting the truth, so it's connecting people through the arts of journalism and writing and music... and just using the power of the arts to transcend cultural intolerance," said Isabel Shocket, coordinator of engagement and initiatives for Hillel.

Traditionally, Pearl's memory is honored each year with a worldwide network of concerts in the month of October — the month of Pearl's birthday — but tribute events occur throughout the year, including last night's concert.

According to Kurtz, Reel Big Fish is a good band to represent this cause in bringing people together.

"(The band) over time has brought in folks from all different groups," Kurtz said.

Their upbeat, fast-tempo songs have helped fans forget their troubles for the past 20 years.

"We wanted to bring a really fun, energetic band, so people can come together and dance," Shocket said.

Kottage and Christianson agree.



"We give them a break from the bullshit," Kottage said.

The band strives to relieve stress no matter where they go.

"That's what we do throughout the world no matter where we go and no matter what the show's about, we go and play music to make people happy to give people a break from their lives," Christianson said. "It's our pleasure to give them a break for a few hours."

However, the Reel Big Fish concert was not the only event at Tech dedicated to celebrating Pearl's memory.

Daniel Pearl Music Days tribute events at Tech began last Wednesday night with a showing of the movie "A Mighty Heart," which tells the story of Pearl's kidnapping and murder.

The week also involved a celebration of Jewish music at the Malcolm Rosenberg Hillel Center on Monday following a dinner to honor and learn from local Holocaust survivors, as well as an open mic night on Tuesday at Sycamore Deli.

The week honoring Pearl's memory will end with a cross-cultural, interfaith Shabbat service on Friday evening at the Hillel Center that is open to students and community members.

According to Kurtz, all the events from the week are costing the hosting groups about \$20,000, with help from the university as well as several other organizations.

The organization of the events in itself has aligned with the original message of Daniel Pearl Music Days, bringing different groups together.

"(We've had) a lot of support from a lot of different communities, which is important because it's doing a lot with a little bit, from a lot of people," Kurtz said.

Although Hillel and the JSU honor Daniel Pearl's memory every year with musical events, it's not certain whether the week-long celebration will be repeated next year.

"I think if we have another team of really passionate, dedicated students it could happen again," Shocket said.