C’ville’s First Pride Festival a Success

September 17, 2012 By Shawn Decker

Photo by Vannathan Hugh L S

Last Saturday, my beloved hometown of Charlottesville hosted its first ever Pride Festival. I heard about it a month or so ago, when my good friends in Bella Morte contacted me about singing a song during their 30-minute acoustic set. Of course, I couldn’t resist being a part of this event to show my support for a community that has shown me so much support since I decided to speak out about being HIV positive.

More on that in a moment. Here’s me singing The Cure’s “Close to Me”, with Bella Morte’s Tony Lechmanski on guitar. He worked up such a great version of a song that is primarily keyboards and bass.

The energy at this event was wonderful. The Facebook Event page blew up with people RSVPing “Yes”, close to 1,000 by the time the event rolled around. Of course, there was the usual Failbook posts about not being able to get a free t-shirt at the event, or wondering if there were going to be too many couples there. Some people really struggle to see what an event like this is truly about- I’m thankful that I got exactly what this event was, and was happy to see a real turnout of support in a packed park full of great energy.

Performing Earth Angel. Love this photo, another one by Vannathan Hugh L S!

Tony, Andy and Marshall of Bella Morte (photo by Vannathan Hugh L S)

Before their set, Bella Morte's singer Andy Deane had a funny line. "If we seem nervous we apologize- we just didn't realize there'd be so many gay people here." Everyone laughed. After they played four songs and Andy invited me up, I said: "If I seem nervous, I'm sorry- I didn't realize Bella Morte would be here." Everyone from vendors, to performers to attendees just had a huge smile on their face. Undoubtedly the result of this past weekend's Festival will make this an annual event, one I look forward to attending every year.

Why? Because my life today wouldn't be possible without my "gay allies", AKA *friends*. When I was just a confused, 20-year old straight kid in Waynesboro, Virginia with a web site, it was a group of gay men at Poz Magazine that opened my handwritten letter and invited to me New York City. It really was a portion of the gay community that gave me confidence in knowing that, as a positoid, I was a catch as a single man. And, when I wrote *My Pet Virus*, once again it was the gay community that pulled the strings to get that book published.

I am forever indebted, and forever grateful.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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