

ACL Fest 2017: How are those layout changes and new additions anyway?

MUSIC By Staff - American-Statesman staff



NICK WAGNER

People dance at the Silent Disco, a new nightly event where people can use wireless headphones to cycle between three DJs. It's from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. Friday-Sunday in the Tito's tent. NICK WAGNER / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

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The biggest change to the grounds at the Austin City Limits Music Festival this year is a new area using space south of Barton Springs Road for festgoers for the first time. Not only has it improved foot-traffic in the main area of the park, it's also become an excellent additional location for music, food and other amenities.

One of those amenities is the festival's primary merch store. It's spacious, air-conditioned (!) and positioned near the Barton Springs East entrance/exit, making it easy to swing by and pick up a shirt or CD on the way out of the fest.

Adjacent to the merch store is an artists store where more creative and craft-oriented items can be purchased. Around the corner from that is a row of food booths featuring satellite locations of a handful of vendors who also have booths in the main ACL Eats area on the north end of the park, including Chi'Lantro, Tino's Greek Cafe and Amy's Ice Creams.

The primary attraction is the Barton Springs Stage, which has the advantage of less noise bleed than other stages because of its separation from the center of the park. We caught a little of Mondo Cozmo as we surveyed the grounds, and Solange played a well-received set there (both return for Weekend Two). Other acts on that stage this weekend include Eagles of Death Metal (Friday), the Black Angels (Saturday) and Tove Lo (Saturday).

— Peter Blackstock

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Silent Disco, what?

At a traditional club, you'll see hundreds of people dancing to whatever music is pumping through a speaker system. If a song comes on that you don't like, tough luck.

At a silent disco — a recent trend at music festivals across the country, including ACL Fest for the first time this year— guests each wear a pair of headphones connected to the DJ. If you take off your headphones, you'll hear the sounds of hundreds of people singing, shouting and laughing to the party happening in their ears.

It's a unique experience that a New York-based company called Quiet Events, which has offices in Austin and other cities around the world, has tweaked to have three DJs spinning different genres that are connected to colors on the headphones in the crowd. All three nights at ACL last weekend, DJs played EDM, '80/'90s hits and hip hop, and the audience could flip between the stations at will and see what everyone else was listening to (they'll be back for Weekend Two). The DJs can also see what people are listening to, which inspired a friendly competition between them on the fest's first Saturday night in the Tito's tent.

One of the easiest ways to see who was winning was by taking off your headphones to hear which crowd was the most vocal, sometimes singing every lyric to a song.

Will Petz, who founded the company six years ago, says it's popular with kids and others who don't love extremely loud situations but still want to dance and have fun with other people.

Quiet Events hosts several events like this a month in Austin, including an upcoming Quiet Clubbing night at the North Door on Oct. 20, the same date as a Mobile Bar Crawl Dance Party downtown, where headphone-wearing partygoers will travel from bar to bar, taking the disco with them.

— Addie Broyles

Keep cool, festers

Despite this week's cold front, the forecast for ACL Fest Weekend Two has temperatures back in the mid-to-upper 80s, which even with cloud cover can warm up Zilker Park, especially on a high-humidity afternoon. So where to cool off?

For starters, a few key spots around the grounds have air conditioning. The biggest is the new ACL Fest Merch Store location, near the Barton Springs East entrance/exit just south of Barton Springs Road. Whether you're buying or just browsing, it's a great place to stop sweating for a little bit.

In the main section of Zilker Park, at least three more locations have AC. One is the long-standing Waterloo Records store, which features music from all of the artists playing the fest. It's on the northeast end of the grounds, between the Tito's and American Express stages. Two others are new: State Farm's Here to Help Lounge, a small but cool enclosed installation at the foot of the rock island near the northwest-central heart of the park. They're also occasionally doing music there; check the sign outside for announcements. The other is the two-story American Express building, not far from the Amex stage. The upper level — with the great view — is not open to everyone, but anyone can go inside the first floor and cool off and partake in a few crafty stations.

Shady places are always welcome. Regular festgoers no doubt know about the spacious Barton Springs Beer Hall on the north end of the park, with college football dominating the screens Saturday and NFL games showing on Sunday. A great new large shaded area is the Wine Lounge, with offerings from around the globe and lots of tables under cover near the Austin Kiddie Limits area on the park's southeast end.

And speaking of Austin Kiddie Limits, there's plenty of natural shade there. The popular family area was moved to the park's shadiest tree grove last year. More shady spots can be found near the center of the park just west of the HomeAway stage (near where the BMI Stage was in previous years); and in various nooks alongside the spacious new Barton Springs Stage area.

— Peter Blackstock