

Dispatches

Extremely rare coins make their way to Chicago; the Obamas visit Ireland; a Wild West theme park in Germany; Boston's harbor gets a makeover; the 20th anniversary of Perry Farrell's Lollapalooza.

CHICAGO Ring Master

Perry Farrell looks back on 20 years of Lollapalooza



— ROD O'CONNOR

"This is my version of being a musician. Not only do you make the music, but you build the party," says Perry Farrell, founder of the seminal L.A. rock group Jane's Addiction, relaxing in his suite at the Ritz-Carlton in Chicago. "I started with the street urchins in 1980s Los Angeles. We put on our own parties because we couldn't play the Sunset Strip or other places in town. That's how I cut my teeth."

Farrell’s latest party is his biggest yet: the 20th anniversary of Lollapalooza, the genre-blurring music festival he founded, which has become a cultural touchstone. Looking like a 50-something James Dean with slicked hair and crisp white T-shirt, Farrell is in Chicago to unveil the 2011 lineup: a diverse 150-band roster that includes Coldplay and Eminem. But he can’t help flashing back to 1991, when it all started. “I put a summer camp together for my peers,” Farrell says. “I didn’t just want one support act. I wanted to bring Henry Rollins and Ice-T and all of these crazy people with me.”

The festival’s communal spirit remains, but there have been changes over the years. For example, edgy sideshow acts have been replaced by beatbox workshops and temporary tattoos at the “Kidzapalooza” tent. “The audience is much wider. The hipsters are there, but they’re with 7-year-old kids with sprayed Mohawks,” says the father of two.

Lollapalooza made the Windy City’s lake-front Grant Park its permanent home in 2005. “It’s been a great relationship,” Farrell says, peering out the window at Navy Pier’s 150-foot-tall Ferris Wheel. The attraction pays homage to the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. Much like that landmark event, Farrell believes his festival has shaped the world’s view of Chicago. “Now, music in this city can rival sports and politics,” he says. “But with Lollapalooza, everybody wins. There’s never a loser in that park. That’s something Chicago can claim.”

Pages: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#)

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