Odd Future Protest at Pitchfork Festival

By LA Weekly

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I dedicate this to every person that doesn’t like me or Odd Future, or any protesters or any organization that doesn’t like me,” Tyler The Creator said just before his collective closed out their set yesterday at the 2011 Pitchfork Music Festival.

West Coast Sound told you last month about a planned demonstration against the group here, protesting their lyrics, which deal in rape, murder, and other capital offenses. But I didn’t see any picketers. Instead, I saw a number of tents dedicated to domestic violence and LGBT violence groups, and found two young women handing out cardboard fans to attendees.

This made sense, considering it was extremely hot - 93 degrees - and humid. The fans were actually mini-placards, signs that read "COOL IT! DON'T BE A FAN OF VIOLENCE" on the front and listed the nine or so co-sponsoring organizations on the back. (Some fans of the collective crossed out the messages and wrote "SWAG" and "WOLF GANG" instead.)
I talked with Yesenia Maldonado, the director of programs at Between Friends, a nonprofit agency focused on ending domestic violence. She and Mary Reese, a volunteer for Rape Victim Advocates, were at the front entrance of the festival handing out the fans. Maldonado said their purpose was to "create awareness of domestic violence and LGBT violence, in direct opposition to today's music."

She added that she was inspired by an article written by critic Jim DeRogatis about the festival, most likely this one, "Pitchfork & Odd Future: Endorsing rape or showcasing art?" in which he opens by citing Eminem’s headlining at Lollapalooza and quips, "this summer is potentially a banner season for lyrics full of hateful fantasies about raping and murdering women echoing through Chicago's parks."

Still, Maldonado and others declined to be specifically protesting Odd Future, noting that they had also distributed fans at Counting Crows and Dave Matthews Band concerts.

Kristin Claes, the communications manager of the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, was firmer in decrying Odd Future's content. "We wanted there to be a counterpart to the violent lyrics," she said. She also noted that Pitchfork - for whom, full disclosure, I’m a contributor -- had provided their booth and donated money for extra fans. The media had blown their "protest" way out of proportion, she claimed.

When Odd Future took the stage at 3:30, the heat was unbearable, and the crowd was packed with sweaty teenagers -- of surprisingly balanced gender. In fact, plenty of girls rapped along with their lyrics. After MellowHype (aka Hodgy Beats and Left Brain) came out to the their track "64," a hobbled Tyler emerged, his leg cast in neon plaster.

"Big props to the domestic violence group that's here today," he said. "We hope you're listening. This song's for you."

Then he launched into MellowHype's "I Got A Gun (You Better Run)."

He was equally animated for the rest of the performance. Sitting on a stool, wearing a Playboy bunny cap and a tie-dye t-shirt with a peace sign on it, he closed out his performance by saying: "To all the people who do like Odd Future: Go crazy."

Then the crowd rapped along with nearly every word of "Pigeons" "Radicals," particularly the chorus: "Kill people, burn shit, fuck school." Tyler proceeded to jettison his stool into the crowd.

This protest - or non-protest - would probably not have been a big deal at all, had Tyler not made a big deal of it. But it seemed like a savvy move, nonetheless. Backed by screaming fans, he placed his antagonists in the minority, as if trying to shame them. The message seemed to be: Any person who hates Odd Future will be subjected to the jeering mass of exclusion.

More photos below.
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