



# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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### The third annual FestForums conference culminated with an awards ceremony featuring T-Bone Burnett, Jeff Bridges, Kenny Loggins and others

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For three days last week, the Fess Parker Inn played host to the third annual FestForums, with the tag line "Where Festivals Converge," featuring panels of noted professionals, networking ops, an awards ceremony and high-profile finale of events on Saturday afternoon. The afternoon's main event featured Lifetime Achievement awardee T-Bone Burnett, one of the most lauded living music producers, interviewed by great American filmmakers and collaborators, Joel and Ethan Coen, with Jeff Bridges, Kenny Loggins, Chuck Leavell, Frances Fisher and others in the celebrity mix.

An ambitious conference geared around a diversity of festival organizers and related professionals from around the country and beyond, FestForums is the brainchild of industry veterans Laurie Kirby and Stuart McNaught (who became Santa Barbara residents within the past year). Well connected within the entertainment and festival industries, the pair launched the event in more humble fashion two years ago here. This year's bigger, better organized third annual event validates the growth and popularity of the effort, which now also includes a New York-based conference.

Special attention was paid to the Coen/Burnett encounter. The filmmaking Coen brothers have worked with Mr. Burnett on several acclaimed projects, including "The Big Lebowski" (also a notable pairing with Mr. Bridges), the bluegrass music-centric "O Brother, Where Art Thou" and the '60s NYC folk-era themed "Inside Llewyn Davis."

The Minnesotan-spawned brothers were obviously friendly comrades with Mr. Burnett and the "interview" session was more a dialogue than a traditional Q&A.

Joel Coen mentioned that "we've had a conversation for 25 years" as creative allies. Asked about his switch from performer to producer, Mr. Burnett explained. "I didn't feel at home on the stage, but felt at home in the studio. It was private. You could do what you damn well pleased there."

Ethan praised him as a "curator and preservationist of American music, who is still alive to new music," and Mr. Burnett cited the influence of predecessors Alan Lomax, Sam Phillips, John Hammond and Ahmet Ertegun.

During an audience Q&A segment, someone asked how he deals with the process of finding the right musical approach to a film project. "It all grows out of character," he commented.

During a conference-ending awards ceremony in the outdoor circular Plaza del Sol, awards were presented to various festivals involved in the conference. And the festival winners were: Cali Roots Festival, Cinema Verde, Forecastle, Good

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Vibrations, the Animal Film Festival, Festival Napa Valley, Canadian Music Week, Lady Filmmakers Festival, and Broke L.A.

Legendary keyboardist Chuck Leavell was given the Champion of the Environment award. As his boss Mick Jagger said, with a laugh, in the preview reel, "He's crazy about trees. That's fine with me. I like trees."

From the film end of the cultural spectrum, FestForums awarded the impressive, underrated actress Frances Fisher, who confessed that in the process of assembling her "sizzler reel" of film clips highlights, she reminded herself, "Oh yes, I am an actress," versus her higher recent profile as an activist, at Standing Rock and on many other fronts. Wearing a t-shirt reading "#StandForSomething," Ms. Fisher was an inspiring presence on the stage.

Mr. Bridges, whose loose flow and relaxed vibe was reminiscent of this classic character The Dude, from "The Big Lebowski," was on hand to introduce and present awards to his longtime friend and ally Mr. Burnett — whom he first met on the set of "Heaven's Gate" some 40 years ago. In "double duty" mode, Mr. Bridges also gave out a Living Legend award to fellow Santa Barbaran Mr. Loggins.

After the Coen brothers paid their witty opening tributes to Mr. Burnett, Mr. Bridges came out to extend his appreciation for his friend and collaborator, saying, "It's difficult to separate the love T-Bone has given to me and what he's given to all of us...in the words of The Dude, 'I dig your style.'"

After a break, Mr. Loggins and his guitarist hit the stage to play a few of his greatest hits — "Danny's Song," "House at Pooh Corner" and "Conviction of the Heart."

Closing out the afternoon, and the conference, British singer-songwriter in New Orleans, Judith Owens — who impressed the Santa Barbara Bowl crowd earlier this year in her opening set for Bryan Ferry — performed a set of her originals. Not one to shy away from between-song banter, she also repeated her most memorable line from her Bowl show: "Life is what happens when you're taking a selfie."

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