



# Festival Time



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Open air festivals are a marvel. People dress up and act-out on a very public stage. To me, these seem like a form of theater in which the public interacts directly with the performers, and the performance itself improvises as the day proceeds.

For the better part of the last two years, most public festivals had to be cancelled due to Covid. But these are slowly returning, and their presence signifies a hesitant step towards "normal life" after two years of social distancing and stay-at-home policies. During the weekend of June 11 and 12 , 2022, I was able to attend two quite different open-air festivals. These were the Baltimore Honfest, and the Catonsville Colonial Fair.

HONfest celebrates the working women who helped make Baltimore a great city. "Hon", which is short for Honey, is a classic Baltimore term of endearment. Since 1994, the HonFest has grown from the tiny Baltimore's Best Hon pageant behind Café Hon, to a nationally recognized festival that covers four city blocks on Hampden's 36th Street. The Honfest includes streetside hairdo salons, local music performances, talent and beauty competitions, parades, crafts stands, and food galore. Naturally, the highlight of the weekend are the ladies who come dressed in full Hon regalia.

Somehow the spirit of John Waters has also meandered into the festival, with images of Pink Flamingo and Water's own profile gracing Honfest souvenirs. Sadly---no make that tragically---Cafe Hon closed in 2022 after 30 years of operation. Though the restaurant at the very heart of Hon-culture was no longer there, the festival soldiered on.

The Catonsville Colonial Market Fair took place at the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum on June 12th. The fair celebrates the life and times of Benjamin Banneker who was a free Black man who owned a farm near Baltimore. Benjamin Banneker was largely self-educated in astronomy and mathematics. He was later called upon to assist in the surveying of territory for the construction of the nation's capital. He also became an active writer of almanacs and exchanged letters with Thomas Jefferson, politely challenging him to do what he could to ensure racial equality. At the colonial fair, there was a tour of the reconstructed, small house that Banneker was raised and lived in. There were exhibitions of colonial-era textile weaving, book printing, and wood carving; of characters dressed in stylish 18th century garb; of a fife and drum corps; and of historical interpreters telling tales from Banneker's time.

In this series, selected images are presented from Baltimore's Honfest and from the Catonsville Colonial Fair. Where one fest stops and the other starts should be fairly clear. The line connecting the two, though, is the summertime joy that comes from the actors and visitors as they step into this theater in a public space.









































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