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Performance painter a NedFest highlight

Music festival features Widespread Panic's Jimmy Herring

By *C. Alan Crandall*

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Keith "Scramble" Campbell, of Arvada, paints to the beat of the music during the NedFest music festival last year in Nederland. (Jeremy Papasso/ Camera)

It would be a challenge to find a painter as prolific as Denver performance artist Keith "Scramble" Campbell.

The self-taught artist is regularly found at music events creating original paintings of the elements offered up by the concert experience. The band, music, audience and surroundings are all represented in a rainbow of flowing acrylics and canvas.

Campbell brings the art to the people by combining his love of music with a flurry of color and motion. He dances to the music and completes an entire painting during the show.

Campbell's next stop is NedFest, an annual three-day music festival planned for today through Sunday in Nederland. Campbell is the festival's featured artist this year. The festival features live music from the Jimmy Herring Band, Keller Williams, Kyle Hollingsworth Band, Melvin Seals and the Jerry Garcia Band, Steve Kimock, Great American Taxi and many other artists.

For over 20 years Campbell has been attending events, painting over 700 different bands and creating over 2,200 unique works. It was at one of these concerts that Campbell's performance art came to the attention of documentary filmmaker Eric Peter Abramson.

"I first saw him paint at a festival Leftover Salmon put on in Lyons around 1997 and was instantly hooked on his energy, attitude and artistic output. In my work with bands, festivals and live concert shoots, we would cross paths over the years," said Abramson.

Seeking a positive and fun subject matter for a documentary film, Abramson reached out to Campbell to pitch a new project.

"Out of the blue he called me and asked if I wanted to be the subject of a documentary telling a little bit about my story," Campbell said.

Soon after, the pair began working on the documentary "Scramble Vision." The film was over two years in the making. Abramson followed Campbell to many different events and shot hours of footage. He secured interviews and appearances from many

different artists, including Jeff Austin, Ben Kaufmann, Bill Kreutzmann, John Popper, Little Feat, Leftover Salmon and String Cheese Incident. The timing was right for the artistic matchup of the director/camera and the subject/artist. Campbell and Abramson worked from mutual respect for each other's art.

"Scramble is not only a generous and amazing artist in his own right, he is also a great student of documentary film," Abramson said. "It's been very gratifying to have a subject that appreciates and respects my art form as well as his own."

Campbell's performance art grew out of the clubs around Orlando, Fla., painting with bright neon paints under blacklight to the music of DJs at raves.

"I was doing this cartoon surrealism stuff and really not getting accepted in group shows," he said.

Campbell's first big break came in 1991 when he was accepted as a participating artist in the first year of the music festival Lollapalooza. The first tour included 12 cities with 12 artists, and the idea of bringing the art to the people jibed with Campbell's vision and direction. When the jam band scene began to develop in the '90s, Campbell found a new focus for his performance art. After completing a commissioned piece for Wide Spread Panic's drummer, Todd Nance, the band invited Campbell to paint one of its shows at Red Rocks in June 2000.

Now Campbell is as much at home painting the symphony as he is at Red Rocks. In his off time he works with children demonstrating the performance art process and then setting the young artists loose on their own mural or canvas.

"Scramble Vision" had its world premiere at Mountainfilm in Telluride in May 25, and it will be screened at NedFest.

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