



Dear Friend,

I'm writing this by the fire on the first day in two weeks that the temperatures have climbed above zero. Winter has fully settled into Meagher County, and like the season, some challenges require us to sit with discomfort and navigate them with care.

A recent decision regarding our festival lineup has given me pause for reflection, and I want to share my thought process with you—our festival family.

As many of you know, the 2024 Emerging Artist competition winner, **Give It To 'Em FLORABELLE!**, was selected overwhelmingly by our audience. Led by **Cara Schulz**, this high-energy band from Missoula earned their spot on the Main Stage this year through the fan vote, a tradition we hold in high regard.

Earlier this winter, concerns were raised about Florabelle's previous band, *War Pony*, and past creative choices that included racial caricatures and cultural appropriation. These concerns led to the band being removed from an upcoming event in Missoula. The situation quickly escalated online, and the band members faced significant public backlash.

We take cultural appropriation and its harm seriously. We acknowledge the pain that past actions have caused and do not minimize it. Racism in any form has no place in our community, and we are committed to learning and growing—both as individuals and as a festival.

At the same time, we also believe in accountability, growth, and the ability for people to make meaningful change. It is our understanding the band has taken accountability for their mistakes. They have vowed to learn and seek to repair the damage they have caused. We choose to take them at their word.

For these reasons, we have made the decision to **keep Florabelle on our lineup.**

Our festival has always been about connection, resilience, and lifting each other up. Moving forward, we welcome thoughtful dialogue and honest conversations that help us all learn and grow together.

Thank you for being part of this community.

Sarah

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