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**Delta Music Institute rocks the 22nd annual Juke Joint Festival**

**CLEVELAND, Miss. —** Students from Delta State University’s Delta Music Institute (DMI) once again delivered a standout performance behind the scenes at the 22nd annual Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale recently, running production for four outdoor stages and approximately 20 musical acts throughout the day.

The student teams, all enrolled in the DMI 314 Live Sound Reinforcement class, handled every aspect of live sound setup and execution—from equipment transport and staging to managing audio levels and artist preferences on-site. The hands-on gig has been part of the DMI experience since 2015 and is a capstone event for students enrolled in the course.

“My first time working Juke Joint Festival was in 2016, and I’ve seen firsthand how it’s grown and how our students continue to rise to the challenge,” said Ben Yarbrough, assistant professor of practice in DMI’s Entertainment Industry Studies department. “This event is essentially their final exam. They manage four full stages and get real-world experience in live production that’s hard to replicate in the classroom.”

Festival organizers reported that the thousands of festival attendees came from at least 47 U.S. states (plus D.C.), 26 international countries and 49 Mississippi counties. Saturday alone featured 17 free daytime music stages with 93 performances, and Saturday night featured 27 venues with 54 acts. The 100-plus musicians who performed ranged in age from 8 to 98 years old, and they came from as far away as Belgium and Colombia.

Festival co-founder and owner of Cat Head Delta Blues and Folk Art in Clarksdale Roger Stolle praised the DMI teams for their contributions. He said, “The DMI has been an amazing festival partner for years. Hard-working, positive and professional, their teams do an incredible job navigating the occasional challenges that are inherent to fast-paced outdoor events—from sometimes debatable weather to occasionally cantankerous musicians.”

DMI senior Travon Harris, an Entertainment Industry Studies major from Greenville, worked the event for the second time and said the experience gave him new insight into navigating the demands of artists and outdoor venues.

“Last year, it rained during the second act, and we had to move our setup indoors,” Harris said. “This year, the sun was out, and it was a beautiful day. Experiences like this teach us how to deal with all kinds of challenges.”

DMI Director and professor of practice in DMI’s Entertainment Industry Studies department Dr. Richard Tremmel said, “We provide all the equipment needed and supervise the ‘run of show.’ The class is divided into 4 teams of 4-5 students each, depending on course enrollment. This gig has proven to be a very valuable experiential learning experience for Entertainment Industry Studies students.”

Students traveled to Clarksdale early Saturday morning, beginning their day by loading the DMI trailer and departing campus at 7 a.m. Performances ran from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., followed by packing up and returning to Cleveland around 8 p.m. Each team of four to five students managed their assigned stage, ensuring artists—including “Big A” Anthony Sherrod, Heavy Suga and the Sweetones, Theo “Boogieman” Dasbach, the Delta Blues Museum Band, R.L. Superbad and many more—had a smooth performance.

DMI Studio and Production Manager Austin Rutledge was on-site to provide support, but the students carried out the majority of the responsibilities. In addition to being evaluated by faculty, students also complete peer reviews as part of their course assessment.

Yarbrough noted the value of such immersive opportunities, stating, “It’s an amazing opportunity for students to get real-world experience and to learn the ins and outs of running a show. The DMI is proud to offer experiential learning opportunities like this for our students.”

Several students echoed that sentiment. Khari Brown, a senior Entertainment Industry Studies major from Horn Lake, said, “Juke Joint was a perfect learning experience for those who are interested in live sound or in seeing what performances look like for big events.”

Matthew Hodge, a senior Entertainment Industry Studies major from Brandon, added, “From sound production to theory, the DMI experience at the Juke Joint connects our education to the real world of the music industry.”

Davionna Hangern, a junior Entertainment Industry Studies major from Greenville, described it as “a hands-on opportunity to learn and experience live sound by working with real equipment, managing audio levels, and understanding how sound interacts in a live setting.”

In addition to the live sound teams, DMI performance groups DeltaRoxx and Ol Skool Revue also took the stage, giving student musicians the chance to perform for festival audiences. Students audition at the start of each semester to join the bands, which award course credit and scholarship opportunities.

Stolle said, “Having DMI as such a reliable resource has absolutely helped the Juke Joint Festival to expand through the years, adding new stages and more performances while still maintaining great sound execution. Additionally, we are always thrilled to feature DMI's student bands, offering a memory-making opportunity to play on the Delta Blues Museum main stage, downtown. Cleveland is lucky to have DSU and DMI, and Clarksdale is lucky to have such great neighbors nearby.”

Whether behind the scenes or under the spotlight, DMI students brought their best to the Juke Joint Festival—turning knowledge into action and gaining industry-level experience one set at a time.

For more information about Delta Music Institute’s Bachelor of Science in Entertainment Industry Studies and other programs, visit [www.deltastate.edu/business-aviation/delta-music-institute](http://www.deltastate.edu/business-aviation/delta-music-institute). Enrollment for the Fall 2025 semester is underway now.

Cutline: (onstage, L-R) DMI students Nick Aultman, Noah Ervin, Kaitlyn Rocquin, Jalyen Washington, Sami Sabbagh performing as Ol’ Skool Revue at the 2025 Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale.

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**About Delta State University:**Delta State University is a four-year public institution whose nearly 2,700 students come from most U.S. states and more than 45 countries. Acknowledging its beginning as a teacher’s college, the University sustains excellence in teacher education while continuing to expand offerings in traditional as well as unique fields of study. Programs such as those available through the Delta Music Institute, the Commercial Aviation Department, and the Center for Interdisciplinary Geospatial Information highlight the University’s commitment to meeting the evolving needs of the students it serves with world-leading, industry-acclaimed programs. Situated in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, Delta State offers top-notch academic programs in business, arts, sciences, nursing, education, and more. DSU Athletics has won 14 national championships, 70 conference championships, and 37 regional titles.