

# Grandoozy Day One Reviewed: Uber, Kendrick Lamar, Tennis and Tickets

Kyle Harris

On Friday afternoon, a cashier at the Walgreens on Broadway mentioned that the store was crowded with out-of-staters in town to party at some music festival at the Overland Park Golf Course. Heard of that place? Nah, a customer replied.

Earplugs, sunscreen and water were still in stock, so there wasn't exactly a stampede for festival supplies. But it was busy. Much busier than normal: Grandoozy had come to Denver.

An Uber driver, carting me from the *Westword* office to the festival, mentioned the price of tickets: "It's \$90-something for the weekend, right?" she asked. "Nope, \$90-something a day," I replied. Her eyes bugged out. (It's actually \$110 now.)

Having seen Jerry Garcia play Berkeley with the Grateful Dead and Freddie Mercury play with Queen, she said she was excited that so many bands — most of which she'd never heard of — were in town, proof of what a fun city Denver was becoming.



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The party is on at Grandoozy.

Danielle Lirette

When I arrived at 2 p.m., though, it was unclear whether anyone would show up for the fun. The few fans trickling in saw a phalanx of security guards waiting for somebody to screen. Only die-hard festival attendees, who had taken vacation time or didn't have a job but somehow had money to pay for tickets, sauntered onto the golf course in the early afternoon. Mostly, it was pretty people and not-so-pretty journalists.

If it weren't for the temporary stages and buildings, it wouldn't have felt much more crowded than a run-of-the-mill day on the fairway. By brilliant design or good fortune, though, the stages created shade that expanded throughout the afternoon, correlating to how many people were in the audience. If people wanted to stay cool, they had to head to the front. That kept even the smallest crowds together and close to the musicians.

Busy as it became later, it was a shame more people didn't get there early in the day. That's when most of the local acts hit the stage — and they were good. From beginning to end, every artist delivered. (Make a note: Get there early for the rest of this inaugural Grandoozy, and for every one hereafter).

By the time people got off work, ran home to don their festival attire, pre-partied and took the train, bus, Uber or a bike to the no-parking festival, it looked like the Superfly promoters had pulled it off: The place was packed. Anybody with a touch of agoraphobia was either holding back tears or pushing their way through the crowd to a quiet spot.

Grandoozy has three big stages — Rock, Paper and Scissors. Rock and Scissors have artists playing at the same time. When those acts end, another takes to the Paper stage. They're close enough that people who can walk at a good clip can catch every artist, but far enough apart that sound doesn't bleed too much. The promoters run the show with military precision, and on the first day, there was rarely a moment when fans had to wait more than ten minutes for a set to begin.

Soaring Denver pop act [AMZY](#) played the first notes of Grandoozy from the Rock stage and launched into an energetic performance. A massive beach ball with the band's name on it bounced over the crowd. On the scissor stage, [Flaural](#) played a competent but subdued set to a handful of people who were getting in the mood with some eccentric dance moves — people who would later be crashed out under trees.

Roger Sellers, who plays under the moniker [Bayonne](#), offered heavily produced, experimental trance-inspired electronic pop. He's a brooding mustachioed performer, clad in a minimalist black outfit, who transcends the hot-guy-with-some-gadgets-and-no-skill nonsense of EDM with more intricate, softer sounds undergirded with a bass that rattled so hard that fabric convulsed against skin and earplugs barely held back the onslaught. He makes the kind of music suited for a dreamy drive down the California coast, not the bass-meets-jam-band stuff of the Rocky Mountains. Frankly, his austere performance was a relief here.



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Andy Frasco of Andy Frasco and the UN getting the crowd involved.

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After Bayonne wrapped up, [Andy Frasco and the U.N.](#) played a rollicking bluesy set. “Thanks for showing up. I feel like I’m the token Jew on this stage, y’all,” Frasco said, noting that after him, [Ty Dolla \\$ign](#), [Miguel](#) and [Kendrick Lamar](#) would play.

Frasco’s band played in front of footage of his doppelgänger, Bob Ross. For kids too young to remember: He’s that PBS artist from the ’80s, a white guy with a big ’fro who taught Gen Xers how to paint clouds and trees. On Frasco’s piano was a fifth of Jameson — maybe more.

“I plan to drink this whole bottle in 45 minutes,” the length of his set, he said.

Most of the band’s songs were irresistible, pure blues and R&B-infused rock and roll. His crass banter — “We’d better skull-fuck this crowd” (at least that’s what I think I heard and pretty much what they did) — was easier to resist, as was the act’s final song, a cover of Rage Against the Machine’s “Killing in the Name.” No matter: Final songs at a festival are less important than they are at a regular concert; everybody’s headed to the next best thing.

Over at the Scissors stage, [Jade Bird](#) wailed and strummed her acoustic guitar, singing about love lost and love found, giddy to be there. At times, her throwback singer-songwriter numbers felt musty, but were freshened up when she switched from nice-folkie mode to screaming punk.

Those acts were followed by the Denver darlings in [Tennis](#). Lead singer Alaina Moore barely moved when she performed, and when she did, fans went wild. After a few droning nostalgic songs, Alaina Moore mumbled an apology for how sexy she was that day. Her fans loved it; my eyes rolled.

The band's subtlety is unmatched; it was so subtle that I began to wonder if my blood sugar was crashing or if the songs were inducing sleep. So I took a burrito break and came back just in time for my favorite Tennis song, "Never Work for Free."

The band makes undeniably good music. Their performance, though sparse, exhilarated fans. And by the end of the set, they won over the growing crowd. Still, it wasn't crashing blood sugar that had lulled me.



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Ty Dolla \$ign played some bangers for the crowd.

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Then, on the main stage, Ty Dolla \$ign resuscitated the festival. Decked out in a John Lennon T-shirt and tight plaid pants, the crooning rapper demonstrated why hip-hop dominated the main stage opening night and why it's become the biggest genre of our time: That music is alive.

As he played, Grandoozy started looking like a real music festival. Ty Dolla \$ign worked the crowd, inviting whoever "has the best weed in Denver" on stage to drink a shot and smoke a joint. His backing band and hype men drummed fans into a frenzy.

I wanted to go catch some of what [Bishop Briggs](#) offered, but the crowd had finally showed up, and I was cornered, so I stuck it out through the full Ty Dolla set.

When he broke out a bass and played it in that hey-guys-look-I'm-a-real-musician way, he punctured the crowd's energy. But he brought it back for the last song, singing about partying, heading into the crowd and wrapping up toward the back of the audience, while a puzzling array of trauma porn — cops, dogs, Civil Rights-era stuff — played on the big screen.

After that, [Big K.R.I.T.](#) kept the crowd moving at the Paper stage, offering his conscious, upbeat, love-infused raps and reminding fans, “We’re all kings and queens of our own destiny.”

He was followed by two sets: The indie-rockers in [Phoenix](#) on the Scissors stage, who did what they do well, from what little I saw, but pretty pop star [Miguel](#) was calling.

As I raced to the Rock stage, I noticed people in suits — misfits in the crowd of scantily clad, sequined festiviarians. I was rubbernecking so intensely, trying to figure out who they were and why on earth they'd wear suits on a hot day, that I nearly tripped over Mayor Michael Hancock, as he and his entourage were given a tour by festival executive producer David Ehrlich (smartly wearing shorts).

By the time I realized that I should probably ask the mayor some questions, he was being whisked into the VIP section and I was being lured by Miguel with his bawdy, sex-positive, emotionally sensitive, drug-loving pop.



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Some people are VIP.

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Distracting people from politics \_ even journalists? That’s what pop does best.

Miguel did offer some good advice for attendees: “If you’re a fellow, hands off if you don’t have permission.” He said that before launching into a song about fucking all night and another asking “Do you like drugs? Me, too. Me, too” and another new number, “So I Lie,” about how people fake being happy in this rotten world.

[War on Drugs](#) offered straightforward rock with occasional rambling jams. The music was mostly great, but I was focused on getting a good spot to see Kendrick Lamar and headed over to grab a good spot.

But waiting turned out to be pointless.

By the time Lamar was slated to come on, people pushed and prodded their way through the legion of patient suckers and made an already crowded situation untenable. Then some guy announced that the concert would include concussion mortars that would create “loud booming effects.”

I ached for [Helene Orr and her band of neighbors in the Overland Park neighborhood](#) who had worried that the festival would be a horror show for elderly residents. It’s one thing to have relentless bass from EDM DJs pounding all day, as they’d feared; it was another to turn the festival into what sounded like it would be a war zone.

Lamar came on soon after he was slated to — a merciful gesture for any headliner and a sign that Grandoozy is doing things right. His entrance included one of those mortars, and yep, it was loud. So were the fireworks after his show.

But everything in between — Pulitzer Kenny’s performance included songs from across his career — was characteristically stunning: politically provocative, emotionally vulnerable and hard-lined. All those gritty documentary-style poetics are the opposite of the party-without-care vibe of a festival, which made his performance all the more subversive.

Sure, fans can escape modern horrors by dancing a weekend away at a golf course. And of course they can bounce to Lamar’s songs — with more than a few white people belting out the N-word with abandon in some perverse solidarity. But not without a reminder that the world can be a dangerous, racist place.

My concerns after the show, though, were not so focused on the brutal social strife of Denver. They were downright bougie: Transportation out of the festival was terrible — though not as bad as it could have been.



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Passengers wait and wait for an Uber.

Kyle Harris

As an experiment, each night I'm trying all three recommended methods to see which is cheapest, fastest and easiest. Last night I tried Uber, the ride-share company that's the official sponsor of the festival. The city had shut off an entire lane of Santa Fe Drive to accommodate Ubers and Lyfts — but still a quagmire formed.

Desperate workers barked orders as they tried to herd drunk music fans onto the sidewalk so that they would stop running in front of cars. Uber drivers, hoping to make a few bucks, were stuck waiting in an endless line, receiving calls from very important customers with very important messages stating the obvious: The traffic was a veritable clusterfuck.

It was almost as though Uber had orchestrated a mass performance-art piece demonstrating what a bad idea rideshare services can be for events like this.

I finally found my Uber driver, who'd come to Colorado from Iraq back in 2008 as a translator for the U.S. military.

He was furious about the traffic, translating his experience into the only words that made sense: "Fuck, fuck, shit, fuck." Festival-goers darted in front of us; drunk bikers and other drivers weaved across lanes. It was a doozy of a mess.

By the time he pulled up to the *Westword* office, I had almost forgotten what a utopia Grandoozy had created. But

tomorrow is another day.

[Grandoozy](#), through September 16, Overland Park Golf Course, 1801 South Huron Street.