



CLOSE-UP

Stealth Rock

SEPTEMBER 15TH SAW THE START OF THE FIRST ROCK music festival in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 35 years. After three decades of war, including nine years when Taliban and radical rulers banned all non-Islamic music, Kabul's rockers were not sure how safe it would be to perform in public. But the Sound Central shows, announced only hours beforehand, went ahead without incident.

Local heavy metal band White Page [pictured], and many others jolted neighbors at secret rock bunker parties, and then risked performing outdoors at the mountain-ringed Babur Gardens. Sound Central was founded by Travis Beard, an Australian who came to Afghanistan as a war photographer only to spend several years stoking Kabul's few metalheads, punks, skaters, and street artists until they came out of their hiding spots and created the first post-Taliban counter-culture.

Afghans who witnessed the rock shows offered reactions ranging from "This is the greatest day of my life!" to "What is this and why is it so loud?"

DANIEL J. GERSTLE

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID GILL