



Robert Randolph and crew perform at Songwriters in Paradise in Hope Town, Bahamas. The SIP festival makes its first stop in Napa on March 21-24. Brooke Stevens Photography.

There's a new music festival happening in Napa Valley, and if the massive crowds of BottleRock just aren't your thing, this one might be for you.

An annual event in Hope Town, Bahamas and Cabo, Mexico, Songwriters in Paradise (SIP) is trading beaches for vineyards and coming to wine country. The four-day festival taking place March 21-24 will feature acoustic performances by more than 20 of the country's top songwriters and artists who have penned lyrics for the likes of Jimmy Buffet, The Zac Brown Band, Hootie & The Blowfish, Spin Doctors and more.

Songwriters in Paradise founder Patrick Davis is a Nashville-based songwriter who has written songs for big-time artists like Lady Antebellum, Jewel and Hootie & the Blowfish, in addition to producing his own solo albums.

He came up with the idea for SIP in 2013 when he was invited to perform at Firefly Sunset Resort in the Bahamas and brought together seven of his music industry friends to play the inaugural event. SIP has since more than doubled in the number performers and events and celebrated its seventh anniversary in February.

"We took the island from 25 percent capacity that week to 100 percent sold out. We're in deep talks about expanding to two weeks next year," said Davis, who launched SIP in Cabo three years ago.

David Duncan, proprietor of Silver Oak and Twomey Cellars, proposed bringing the festival to Napa after meeting Davis at a wedding in Napa several years ago.

Their bond was instant. Duncan is a vocalist and plays harmonica in local wine country band, The Silverado Pickups. Once Davis was finally ready to give it a go, everything came together. He was introduced to some of Duncan's friends, including fellow bandmate Jeff Gargiulo of Gargiulo Vineyards, and it was a domino effect from there.

“Just like the music community, the wine community is just very small and everyone knows everybody. It feels very family and very organic, which is something I really love,” said Davis. “That’s what SIP is. There’s about 20-25 songwriters who come to most events and it feels like a family event. As performers and songwriters, we’re usually in and out of a location. But with SIP, we can stay together in one place for a six-to eight-day period and now it happens three times a year.”

SIP Napa concerts will be hosted at four Napa Valley winery locations: Silver Oak, **Alpha Omega**, Gargiulo and Brasswood. These performances are limited to just a few hundred attendees.



Wyatt Durette and Chris Gelbuda at SIP Hope Town. Brooke Stevens Photography.

You won’t be bumping elbows and fighting your way to the stage like you would at a larger festival, and don’t expect a theatrical performance with bright lights and wild costumes either. SIP concerts are casual and stripped down in order to focus on the songs and lyrics (think, Lady Gaga in “A Star is Born” versus Lady Gaga at the Super Bowl). Each will have three sets featuring a handful of songwriters seated on the stage at once, taking turns playing songs.

“It’s meant to be a highly intimate, exclusive and unique situation where you get to have a very up close and personal relationship with the music and performers. There isn’t much of a barrier between the fan and performer and it’s a lure for us to interact with the people who are listening,” said Davis, who admitted that at most shows, the performers leave almost immediately after. “At SIP, we’re there playing and hanging out for three to four hours at one place with the fans and interacting at every level.”

Host resort Harvest Inn takes this intimacy one step further. Guests of Harvest Inn during the festival will be hanging out in the same spot as all SIP performers and staff. They’ll be privy to an exclusive invitation to a bonus concert, and it wouldn’t be a stretch to assume that some impromptu jam sessions will break out between or after performances.

On Sunday, the resort will host a Charity Karaoke event with free admission to the public. This and other initiatives throughout the weekend will raise money for local charities. They raised close to \$60,000 at last month’s Hope Town festival.

SIP Napa is currently selling a limited number of single- event tickets, four-day passes and three-day passes. For more information, visit songwritersinparadise.com.