



As the largest guitar festival in Europe, the Guitar Guinness World Record event attracts fans from all over Poland and Europe. This is what 7,000+ guitar fans look like.



Some American magazine editor was invited to destroy “Wild Thing.”



Victory! Festival founder Leszek Cichoński and Wrocław President Rafal Dutkiewicz (holding “7,411” sign) show the crowd the Guinness record has been broken.



Seeking the Univibe

Poland’s “Play Along” Guitar Festival Breaks Guinness World Record

BY MICHAEL MOLEND A

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DARIUSZ PTASZYSKI

EACH YEAR FOR 16 YEARS NOW

Leszek Cichoński—founder of the Guitar Guinness World Record Festival (formerly, the Thanks Jimi Festival)—puts out the call for players to come to Wrocław, Poland, and attempt to smash the Guinness Record for Largest Guitar Orchestra. The last time this happened was in 2016, when 7,356 guitarists descended on the city’s beautiful Market Square to capture the title. The guitar army fell a bit short last year, amassing 6,299 players, and missing the opportunity to break its own record.

This year was a different story.

When Cichoński and Wrocław President (“mayor” in USA parlance) Rafal Dutkiewicz announced the official results, the jubilant outcry was tremendous. The 2018 festival had logged 7,411 players. Mission accomplished!

Record smashed!

The record attempt is always undertaken on May 1, by performing a communal version of “Hey Joe,” as the song’s simple chord progression is repeated over and over, making it simple for guitarists of all skill levels to join in the fun. (The festival also posts “how-to’s” on its website.) The massive guitar task force is full of little children, teens, Millennials, senior citizens, policja (police—some on horseback with guitars), *Star Wars* stormtroopers, clowns, various strummers in animal costumes, and even normal, everyday people—all bearing everything from battered acoustics to prized instruments and unplugged electrics. Typically, there is a run-through of the song, and then the big moment is launched for the record books.

But the day-long festival isn’t just about breaking a Guinness record. It’s pretty much a titanic celebration of the guitar and guitar music that includes rehearsals, performances, and special events on the main stage from early morning until near dark. Cichoński has continued the original festival’s salute to Jimi Hendrix, and much of the day’s musical performances revolve around songs written or covered by the eternal guitar master.

Not surprisingly, the Wrocław festival is big news all over Europe. With the record broken this year, Cichoński’s beaming face, and the churning, strumming hordes of guitarists crammed into the Market Square, were images blasted on televisions and media streams throughout the continent and beyond. ■

What Is Univibe?

EVERYONE KNOWS THE UNI-VIBE IS A CLASSIC GUITAR effect. But in the context of Leszek CiCHOŃSKI's guitar festival and musical spirit, "Univibe" stands for "universal vibration," a communal hand signal, and so much more.

"This is a brand new idea I'm trying to promote to show the power of music and to unite us all," says Cichoński with unbridled enthusiasm. "The Univibe sign with its three fingers on the right hand represents hope, faith, and love. In Poland, it can also mean 'take care.' You see, so many things seek to separate us these days, but Univibe is all about uniting us. I ask all guitarists and all musicians around the world to show awareness for this sign. Let's change the world!" —MM



ASATA WŁADYCZKA

Univibe Believers (left to right)—Polish rocker Andrzej Nowak, London-based blues guitarist LeBurn Maddox, me, Cichoński, and bassist/actor David Price projecting the Univibe.



United State—The audience shares its Univibe spirit.



It wouldn't be an event without a photo backdrop, right?



A festival tradition—raising guitars to kiss the sky in honor of Jimi.

