



Saturday, August 18, 2012
Rosa Parks Circle, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Media Contact:
Molly Klimas
616-443-4647
klimas@intentpr.com

Major jazz festival coming to Grand Rapids this summer

First-ever GRandJazzFest is Saturday, Aug. 18, at Rosa Parks Circle and FREE

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. – APRIL 10, 2012 – Community leaders and festival organizers today officially announced a major new music festival coming to West Michigan this summer: **GRandJazzFest comes to Grand Rapids' Rosa Parks Circle on Saturday, Aug. 18, for an entire day and evening of free performances featuring major jazz artists who are Michigan-based.**

"We've got Blues on the Mall. We've got Festival of the Arts and Celebration on the Grand. We've got ArtPrize and LaughFest. ... I'm proud to announce that we now have GRandJazzFest!" Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell said at a press conference to announce the event.

The festival is being organized by Grand Rapids resident Audrey Sundstrom and a group of jazz aficionados, including the West Michigan Jazz Society, who are bringing the daylong festival to the region.

"For years, my husband Greg and I and our friends have gone to jazz festivals in other parts of the state – great festivals. There's just one thing wrong with them: they're not here! So, we're excited to bring a major jazz festival to West Michigan," Sundstrom said. She is the wife of City of Grand Rapids Manager Greg Sundstrom.

The festival is being financed by generous sponsors and a number of in-kind contributors so it can be free to the public.



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“GRandJazzFest is pleased today to announce our presenting sponsor – **DTE Energy Foundation**,” Audrey Sundstrom said. “DTE is an organization that is hugely present in and committed to our community. We are so thankful for their gracious and generous support!”

DTE Energy Foundation representative Roger Royer noted that Grand Rapids recently was acknowledged by *Forbes* magazine as the best city in the United States in which to raise a family.

“Grand Rapids was recognized nationally as a GREAT place to raise a family, and praise goes to Mayor Heartwell and his team for that. And we at DTE thought that, as the excitement and heat of the summer builds, adding some cool jazz to the equation would contribute to making Grand Rapids a great place to be. The festival fits great with our mission of being involved in the fabric of the communities we serve, and GRandJazzFest is a fantastic thing for the entire West Michigan community,” Royer said.

West Michigan Jazz Society is the non-profit fiduciary entity for GRandJazzFest, and the festival itself is not-for-profit. The jazz society organizes numerous jazz events, including winter jazz gumbos and summer concerts.

“We hope this new event will become a permanent event on the Grand Rapids arts and festivals calendar,” West Michigan Jazz Society President Craig Benjamin said. “The WMJS Board is proud to be associated with GRandJazzFest, and we look forward to a long and successful collaboration in support of America’s own original art form.”

Jazz is being played in more and more venues throughout West Michigan. **Greg Gilmore who owns Gilmore Collection recently turned Ottawa Tavern into a jazz club.** Gilmore Collection provided free pulled-pork sandwiches and sweet-potato chips at the press conference to announce the jazz festival.

Three of six acts announced

GRandJazzFest announced that renowned guitarist **Tim Bowman** will headline the Aug. 18 event.

“Tim is from the Big D, Detroit, and is an extraordinary contemporary jazz guitarist who headlined the 2007 Guitars and Saxes Tour alongside Gerald Albright, Kirk Whalum and Jeff Golub,” Sundstrom said.



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Bowman was named Billboard's 2009 Top 10 Smooth Jazz Artist of the Year and, at the Dubai International Jazz Festival, was named Best Guitarist of 2010. [Media, here is a link to Tim Bowman's EPK: www.buckheadeaston.com/timbowman and a link to some video of Bowman at the Dubai International Jazzfest: <http://youtu.be/tVhubil1KFI>.]

Another major performer announced as part of the GRandJazzFest lineup is **Phil Denny**, a saxophonist from Lansing. Denny was a featured performer at the 2012 Dubai International Jazz Festival. [Media, here is a link to Phil Denny's website: <http://philonsax.com/> and a video of him playing in Dubai: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmVb-lm-RDM>]

A third performing group on Aug. 18 will be Grand Rapids' very own **Walt Gutowski & The Bridge Street Band**. Gutowski and his band played at the press conference, giving attendees a taste of the jazz fest to come. [Media, here is a link to video of The Bridge Street Band playing at Festival of the Arts: <http://www.youtube.com/user/BridgeStreetBand>]

The three additional acts will be announced in the coming months.

"All six of our performing groups are Michigan-local. In this first year of our festival, the Michigan connection – supporting Michigan artists – is very important to us," Sundstrom said.

Support for local businesses

"It's also important to us to support Michigan businesses, which is why we chose to have the festival in downtown GR, very walkable to many restaurants, bars, shops and museums that can be enjoyed the day of the festival," Sundstrom said.

The **Downtown Development Authority** in March awarded GRandJazzFest a \$10,000 grant because of the festival's commitment to supporting downtown merchants.

More information on GRandJazzFest – including the schedule and sponsorship/volunteer opportunities – can be found at www.grandjazzfest.org, and at the festival's Facebook and Twitter sites – www.facebook.com/grandjazzfest and www.twitter.com/grandjazzfest.

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About GRandJazzFest

GRandJazzFest is a community event of the nonprofit organization "GR and Jazz" founded in 2012. GRandJazzFest is a free one-day event on Saturday, Aug. 18, 2012, from noon until 10 p.m., featuring jazz artists who are Michigan-based. GRandJazzFest brings together notable jazz performers as well as highlights up-and-coming artists for diverse audiences. GRandJazzFest is being held at Rosa Parks Circle, a central location in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, where attendees can enjoy music, support local businesses and visit other Grand Rapids attractions. The festival is free. GRandJazzFest has collaborated with the West Michigan Jazz Society (WMJS), which is the 501(c)3 fiduciary organization for the festival. More information at www.grandjazzfest.org.

About West Michigan Jazz Society

The West Michigan Jazz Society (WMJS) is one of the most successful jazz societies in the United States. With stable membership well in excess of 500, the WMJS is responsible for the organization of more than 20 major jazz concerts and events in Grand Rapids each year. The late Betty Forrest (former wife of the great saxophonist Jimmy Forrest) formed the WMJS 26 years ago as a mechanism for the promotion of live jazz and a means of supporting and fostering young jazz talent. For the past quarter of a century, the WMJS has carried out this mission with indubitable success, regularly employing hundreds of West Michigan's talented jazz musicians, and supporting dozens of student musicians through scholarships and performance opportunities. The major focus of the WMJS as promoters of live jazz over recent years has been the Jazz at the Zoo Series, which presents 10 weekly concerts throughout the summer in John Ball Park to audiences of 1,200-1,500 each night; and the Jazz Gumbo Series, which features monthly concerts through the winter at the Kopper Top Guesthouse. In addition, the WMJS arranges a live jazz holiday party and the Musician of the Year event each year. More information at <http://www.wmichjazz.org/>.

2526 Summit Ridge Drive NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Website: grandjazzfest.org Email: grandjazzfest@gmail.com Phone: 616-617-7720