

1ST ANNUAL HOOP CITY JAZZ & ART FESTIVAL

By John G. Osborne

It's been almost four years since the last Mason Square Jazz Festival took place, and according to past attendees, it's been sorely missed. Well, we heard you, and the truth is, we missed it too! Inspired -- and a little restless -- we are coming back "with a vengeance." But, before I give you the details, a little background on our new organization is in order.

In tribute to our city's international recognition as the birthplace of basketball, we have changed our name to Hoop City Jazz, Inc. (HCJ) and expanded our geographic reach to the greater Springfield area and beyond. As an organization, it is our intention to build on our earlier work as the Mason Square Jazz Festival Committee. With your support, over the next 18 months, we plan to present a number of activities and programs that will give jazz a real presence and a home here in Springfield. Also, we hope to bring some much needed recognition and support to our local artists.

HCJ believes that Springfield should have the kinds of activities that we frequently travel to other places to enjoy -- more specifically, amenities like a world-class jazz festival and regular jazz concerts, which we hope to establish in the next few years.

This year, as our "coming out party," we will be presenting a one-day, free-to-the-public festival on **July 7th** at Riverfront Park. Performers include contemporary jazz superstars, guitarist Chieli Minucci w/Special EF/X and Hidden Beach/Hip-Hop saxophonist Mike Phillips -- who absolutely demolished last year's Hartford Jazz Festival (just ask Ronn Johnson, Walt Woodgett or Carol Cutting). Rounding out the bill will be the 12 piece Latin Heartbeat Orchestra, performing in the tradition of Latin greats Eddie Palmieri, Tito Puente and Ray Barreto, and our own "bass man extraordinaire", Jo Sallins. And if that's not enough for you, the show will be hosted by nationally-acclaimed comedian, actor and Springfield native, Wali Collins.

In addition to the entertainment, we will have an International Food Court featuring some of Springfield's finest ethnic restaurants, an art exhibit -- coordinated by Jelupa Productions, Inc., local vendors, a community resources tent and several other interesting activities -- including a raffle for a plasma TV to help build the HCJ Music Scholarship Fund.

Our 1st Annual Hoop City Jazz & Art Festival promises to be a culturally-enriching, high-energy affair and we hope you'll make it your business to come out and support this important seminal event. As you know, if we are to have these kinds of events and activities in our city, it's very important that the public support them. To maintain -- and grow -- our sponsorship base, we need the park "packed-to-the-back." So please spread the word. Bring your family and friends, come early, stay late, and prepare to leave exhausted. This is one jazz party you will not want to miss!

For additional information, you can visit our website at www.hoopcityjazz.org and if you're interested in volunteering or making a donation, you can email me at Keydom@msn.com. We look forward to serving you on **July 7th** and in the future. ■