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Festival Plans to Do More with Less

Adjustments are made to overcome challenges, as programs grow for Top of the Park

ANN ARBOR (January 7, 2010) – The Ann Arbor Summer Festival announces changes for 2010 that will build on its success, while making operational adjustments to improve its financial stability. These efforts will include: extended weekend hours at Top of the Park, while going dark on Monday nights; fewer Mainstage performances; an inaugural cabaret fundraiser in February; and a special online promotion that lets the community vote for the outdoor movies that will be screened at this year's festival.

"We definitely plan to do more with less," said festival director Robb Woulfe. "We're being more creative about partnerships, and looking for new ways to engage the community in the experience. To ensure sustainability, we continue to explore ways to increase revenue and reduce expense, while also promoting greater ownership and broad-based participation from the community."

Maximizing revenue and leveraging new opportunities will be critical as the festival moves forward, particularly as it tries to replace the steady decline of corporate and foundation support. Last year alone, the festival suffered close to a six-figure decrease in sponsorship dollars. Having just completed a successful year-end challenge campaign that hit its goal of \$50,000, as well as being awarded a recent grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the festival is being creative, yet fiscally conservative.

Some of the Ann Arbor Summer Festival's changes and new initiatives for 2010 include:

Extended Weekend Hours and Dark Mondays

Based on last year's successful introduction of earlier start times on select evenings at Top of the Park, the festival will continue to expand its hours of weekend operation with Friday, Saturday, and Sunday now opening at 5:00 p.m. The shift will allow the festival to focus more of its resources on high-traffic nights, providing additional time to program more artists, more activities, and more weekend attractions. This will also offer after work groups and families an incentive to have dinner at Top of the Park. The festival will go dark on Mondays, based, unsurprisingly, on the trend of low attendance and slow business activity on that evening. "Being closed one night each week will provide a breather for patrons, vendors, and staff to re-energize for that coming week's activities," said Woulfe. "For those dedicated festival-goers looking for Monday night entertainment, I encourage them to enjoy a performance or movie at one of the other great venues around town."

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Smaller Mainstage Season

As attendance and revenues increase at Top of the Park, the festival recognizes the economic climate will not support as many ticketed shows as have been presented in the past. "As our outdoor programs grow in popularity, we don't want to split the community or our audience, but rather try to expand it," said Woulfe. "Although the festival will present fewer Mainstage performances this year, we promise not to compromise on quality or depth of programming. We will continue to offer indoor shows that address our most popular audience interests, while utilizing a wider range of appropriate venues and partners for each program." For 2010, the festival plans to again present its Mainstage performances at Power Center, Hill Auditorium, and the University of Michigan Museum of Art, while also looking to introduce new and alternative spaces into the assortment of festival venues.

New Winter Fundraiser: Big TOP Revue

As part of its new program launches for 2010, the festival is excited to introduce the first annual Big TOP Revue, a night of cabaret and cuisine to benefit Top of the Park. Hosted on February 16 (Mardi Gras Day) by Gratz and La Dolce Vita in downtown Ann Arbor, the fundraiser promises to offer a saucy blend of cabaret, circus and burlesque, all choreographed around a sumptuous three-course meal followed by an underground after-party. The event begins at 6:00 p.m. with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, followed by a seated dinner paired with fine wines and cabaret entertainment at 7:00 p.m., and concludes with a late-night after-party show that starts at 9:00 p.m. The Big TOP Revue is a re-interpretation of the festival's previous Chefs fundraiser, keeping a similar gourmet dining experience, but freshening it up with some great entertainment. Tickets per person are \$150 all-inclusive, or \$35 for the after-party only, with a portion being tax deductible. For reservations or more information, please visit annarborsummerfestival.org.

Pick-a-Flick

Will it be *Grease* or *West Side Story*? How about *Kung Fu Panda* or *Harry Potter*? Now through March 1, the festival is asking the community to choose the movies that will be screened at Top of the Park this summer. Participants can vote for their favorites films, as well as write one in for the Wild Card choice, through a survey on the festival's website at annarborsummerfestival.org. The ballot includes titles ranging from classics and cult favorites to more recent blockbusters. Participants can vote as many times as they wish, with the winning line-up being revealed in the spring when the full Top of the Park schedule is announced.

The Ann Arbor Summer Festival's mission is to present a world-class celebration of arts and entertainment that enriches the cultural, economic, and social vitality of the region. Started in 1983, the festival attracts more than 60,000 people each year from the local community and throughout Southeast Michigan. Preparing to celebrate its 27th season, this year's festival runs from June 18 through July 11, 2010. The new season details will be announced starting in March.

For more information, please visit annarborsummerfestival.org.

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