

PVD Drum Troupe Rests: Popular COVID musical event has gone dormant

For much of the pandemic, on Thursday evenings you could encounter a whimsical gathering called the Providence Drum Troupe improvising a rhythm section upon the new pedestrian bridge in Providence. A socially distanced entertainment option during the pandemic, the group grew organically, attracting performers like Jessie Jewel, whose elaborate costumes sometimes include a 12' wingspan, or AJ Salemi, a musician and fire dancer, and, of course drummers of all experience levels, from newbie Jamie Bagley to the group's progenitor David Lee Black. On occasion, jugglers, performers, stilt walkers, mermaids and more have joined in.



Summer Time, when the drumming was permitted

This collection of people looking to jam and kick back grew organically, through word of mouth and notes carried through the air, back when a walkabout was an act of social expression, and it livened-up pandemic Providence; providing levity, music and, perhaps most importantly, the charm of the unexpected. (See <https://motifri.com/a-different-beat-the-providence-drum-troupe-takes-it-to-the-bridge/>)

After being established, and as the world is gradually returning somewhat to normal, the group began to organize, lending itself out to events and celebrations - including a surprise performance at Motif's RI Music Awards this year - but they continued to assemble at the Michael Van Leesten pedestrian bridge.

Recently, the troupe was asked to stop performing on the bridge due to the lack of any kind of performance permit. "Because it was never really planned, we hadn't pursued that," says Black, who

says he understands the concern. “We were out there with drums and playing music.”

However, getting a permit hasn't proved easy. The bridge is controlled by the city — and it has had a bit of a controversial history, starting as the Providence pedestrian and bike bridge, with officers assigned to prevent bikes from crossing it. That was resolved a while ago, but the land on either side of the bridge is managed by the I-195 Redevelopment Commission, requiring permits to coordinate multiple agencies. According to Black, “We are trying to work through what's needed, and from what authority. We're optimistic that we can work it out. Everyone's been friendly and supportive, but we know it will take some time.”

All those involved seem to hope that the Creative Capital will find a way to enable this organic feat of creativity to resume by the time good weather returns. Meanwhile, you may still see the troupe around town. They are making appearances at events, and are banging out completely mobile performances from time to time, weather permitting.

Learn more about the Providence Drum Troupe at www.providencedrumtroupe.com.