

PVDFest to Transform City into Magical Wonderland

Dust off your binoculars, a pair of sturdy walking shoes and a sense of childlike wonder. In early June, 17-foot winged dinosaurs will glide through streets of downtown Providence in search of merriment and new friends. But there's no need to fear these ephemeral beasts. Close-Act, an arts ensemble from the Netherlands, is behind their every move meant to transfix and entertain audiences young and old.

The enchanting spectacle will be part of PVDFest - a four-day international arts festival hosted by arts nonprofit FirstWorks and the City of Providence. From June 2 through June 5 public spaces — such as streets, parks and outdoor stages - will be transformed into visual playgrounds. In addition to the musicians, sculptures and performance artists, more than 70 merchants will be present at the multifaceted event that celebrates the unique offerings of the Creative Capital. Last year, over 100,000 people attended.

“There's going to be so many treats — including surprise street performances, world class music, workshops meant to expose children to the wonders of art. Everyone can participate in this celebration that forges new partnerships between local creatives and those from across the world,” notes Kathleen Pletcher, the founder and director of FirstWorks. “We want people to look at our landscape - whether it be Grant's Block or Burnside Park - from another perspective. Our mission is to expose everyone to the wonder of the arts.”

For those looking for summer sizzle, the festival will feature some red hot flavor. The 17-piece Afro-Cuban All Stars will be delighting music aficionados. Director Juan de Marcos González, who arranged the famed Buena Vista Social Club, leads a multi-generational line-up drawn from some of the island's most beloved bands. Their performances are a celebration of Cuba's rich musical history. And Haitian multigenerational collective Lakou Mizik will play a compilation of Vodou chants and drumming, Rara horns fashioned from sheet metal, Carnevale rhythms, gospel ballads and folk.

For those familiar with sounds hailing from the Ocean State, brother-sister rock duo Vulgarrity will be making an appearance. Brian Chippendale (of Lightning Bolt) will showcase his high-energy drumming in Black Pus. And Providence galleries, including Grin, will be featuring exhibitions. “There's going to be so much to see,” notes Pletcher. “PVDFest is a magical world ready to explore.”

The PVDFest takes place June 2 - 5 at various locations throughout the city. For more information, visit pvdfest.com. Feeling like giving some love to the Providence arts scene? PVDFest is welcoming volunteers. Check out pvdfest.com/volunteer.