

Storytelling Isn't Just For Kids: Live Performances in Providence This October

The concept of StoryFest 2022 was born during a conversation between **Mark Binder** and **Bill Harley**, both of whom are performers and authors with impressive rap sheets. So what is StoryFest exactly? "It's really just a celebration of people getting together and enjoying stories." Binder says, "And if you've never seen world class storytelling, this is the perfect opportunity to come and see it."

Lots of people have a misconception that live storytelling is a medium of entertainment that exists for and caters to young children. You might imagine a parent tucking their child into bed, and lulling them to sleep with a picture book. In truth, storytelling has been a part of human history for centuries: it is only recently that adults stopped participating. "We're just trying to grow the audience for open story narratives," Binder explains. "It's a lot of fun and it's a multi-generational kind of thing. Yes, little kids like it, but the way that the people who are doing this festival, the performers, do it really reaches people of all ages."

Fans of audiobooks are likely to enjoy live storytelling, though there are differences. Listening to an audiobook is usually a solitary activity, while this is done in a group setting. Regardless, the listener can expect an enjoyable and immersive experience. "Audiobooks are an intimate experience, it's a one to one experience. The author or the narrator is talking directly to you, same thing with a book." Binder says. "In a live performance it's much more dynamic and much more fluid. It's influenced by the reactions of the crowd, by the way the audience feels."

"When I'm telling a story, the audience vanishes and all that is happening is this sort of shared storyscape experience. It's very, very visceral and engaging on many, many levels. It's a little like stand up comedy. There's a person with a microphone talking; the distinction is with stand up comedy they're going for laughs and with us, we're going for narrative, which is character and adventure."

Listening to stories doesn't just entertain - it connects people to each other. Research suggests both telling and listening to stories can improve the health and well-being of both hospitalized children and the elderly who are living in nursing homes.

"The more people tell stories to each other about their culture, about their family, the closer they become," Binder explains. "Which is why storytelling is one of the best ways to bridge diverse communities." Stories enable people to share an emotional experience. You can experience empathy by hearing stories about characters from other walks of life. Binder adds, "I tell the same stories to little kids, to bigger kids, to families, to adults, to seniors. The exact same stories. And they all enjoy them."

Along with Binder and Harley, there will be three other performers in attendance. First there's **Marlon Carey** who is a poet and even has his own TEDx Talk. Next is **Keith Munslow**, a musician and improviser who has performed all across New England at festivals, concerts, schools, and more. Finally, Raffini is a member of Rhode Island Black Storytellers, as well as a poet, oral historian and playwright.

The event will take place at Providence Innovation District Park (near the pedestrian bridge), starting at noon on Saturday, October 1, with a rain date of October 2. Chairs will be provided but it's recommended that attendees bring their own seating in case that fills up. Tickets are free and can be

found on americanstorytheater.org.