

HONK! wails through Davis Square



by Matthew Kaplan

Activist marching bands from all over the U.S. contacted community organizers to play at the Honk! Festival on Oct. 6 in Davis Square.

"They contacted us, a lot of them," Honk! Festival committee member Janine E. Fay said.

Eighteen marching bands from various U.S. locations, from Somerville to San Francisco, played at six locations in Davis Square for about 2,000 spectators, ranging from the old to the very young, she said.

Fay said the Second Line Social Aid and Pleasure Society Brass Band, a band based out of Somerville, started the festival last year with 10 acts.

"We came last year and we really liked it," festival attendee Rose Reilly said. "It seems like a lot of fun."

Many of the performers were part of activist bands or performing groups that championed specific causes.



Leslie A. Wacker, the alto saxophone player in the band Environmental Encroachment said that band supported organic food and anti-war causes.

"It's political street theatre," Jennifer S. Harris, a percussion musician in the band Himalayas, said. "This band challenges the standards."



However, not all bands backed specific political causes.

"We're all about creative self-expression; if you're crazy enough to come up with it, do it," Charles A. Lechien, tenor saxophone player and bandleader of the Somerville-based Emperor Norton's Stationary Marching Band, said. "We try to exhibit insanity."

Edward A. Joseph, Original Big Seven Social Aid and Pleasure Club member, said the group came to the festival to promote the Mardi Gras-style musical public party atmosphere of the event "to really bring the culture back."

"We're trying to keep it alive," Joseph said about bringing New Orleans tradition to Somerville. "Every Sunday we have something like this."

Besides promoting specific causes, Jaswinder Pabla, the general manager of Diva Indian Bistro in Davis Square, said festivals such as the Honk! Festival help foster community in the area. Fay said the community, with help from the Davis Square Area Resident-Business Initiative or DARBI, coordinated the entire event.

"It energizes the atmosphere," Nicholas T. Gregory, brother of Redbones BBQ owner Robert Gregory, said of the festival. "It helps Davis Square."

Multiple fair attendees were local residents who heard the music and decided to come and listen to the musicians.

Area resident Jeffrey T. Bartlett said he was biking in the area and decided to stay a little bit to listen to the music.

"We followed the music," Bartlett said. "We were sitting in the living room and we heard it."

Alongside music, the festival also featured a variety of non-musical street performers. For example, the band Himalayas performed alongside the street theatre troupe Lesser Panda. Many of the musical acts included street theatre elements. The Bread and Puppet Circus Band included stilt walkers who danced with the music on stilts.

"It's really the dancing that's important, Nina K. Mueller-Schwarze, Original Big Seven Social Aid and Pleasure Club member, said.

The dancing added to the lively atmosphere that appealed to fair attendee Angela G. Vierling-Claasson. "Everybody got the fire under their asses lit," Wacker said.

Fair attendee Xavier Reilly described the festival as a "great, uplifting experience" ideal for children because it "gets them to listen to real music."

"It's kind of one the cool things [about] being here," fair attendee and local resident Mario A. Alonso said of the festival.

The following day featured an all-band parade from Davis Square to Harvard Square for the purpose of "bringing the streets back to the people," fair attendee Brian D. Oley said.

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