

303

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PRESIDENT OF CITY PARK JAZZ

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With a solid twenty-five years under its belt, City Park Jazz is one of Denver's most cherished Sunday evening activities, attracting hardcore jazz aficionados, folks that jump at anything free, high-schoolers and families alike - and showcasing all-local jazz talent. Its inception in 1986 was intended to liven up the City Park area, which, at the time, was a neighborhood in need of something safe and unifying. Christopher Zacher sits on the all-volunteer board of City Park Jazz as president.

Arriving in Denver six years ago from St. Louis, Zacher quickly made this concert series one of his mainstay activities, becoming treasurer (his accounting and human resources background, combined with his love of music, jazz included, made him an ideal person for the role), then becoming president of the organization. As such, Zacher heads up the outreach and marketing committee, helps fundraising efforts, assists with the setup and takedown of each concert and even co-emcees the event. It ain't easy, but someone's got to do it - what would Denver do on Sundays if not for jazz in the park?

303: Tell me what you love about jazz music.

CZ: Jazz is the basis for so many genre's of music, yet, in its essence, it allows for the artistic freedom to be improvisational. Combine that with brass instruments and thick bass lines, it just makes for fabulous ear candy.

303: Have you always been a fan of jazz? if you could pick any artist to play just one set at City Park, alive or dead, who would it be?

CZ: Growing up in St. Louis, I was raised in a city whose tradition was built on the jazz and blues greats: Scott Joplin, Josephine Baker, Miles Davis, Johnnie Johnson, Chuck Barry, Ike and Tina Turner and so on. If I could see one artist it would be the great pianist Johnny Johnson - he, along with Chuck Berry, transformed music as we know it today. They took blues and jazz riffs to create the rock 'n' roll sound.

303: Who is your favorite band/artist to play at the bandstand on Ferril Lake?

CZ: All of them (and I mean that sincerely). Each week, I say to myself, "Wow! That was the best concert yet."

303: Who are you most excited to see play this summer?

CZ: Chris Daniels & The Kings. Chris has been battling leukemia, and, last year, he received a bone marrow transplant from his sister, and how he's made a tremendous recovery. We had him scheduled to perform in 2010; because of his illness, he was, unfortunately, unable to make the show. However, his band did perform and it was an emotional concert. We're so happy to have Chris back this year, and we know it will be one of the biggest shows of the season (on August 7).



303: What makes you a good fit for president of City Park Jazz?

CZ: There are so many pieces that go into running an organization that reach beyond music. I did grow up in a home filled with music - my father is a multiple-instrument individual, and, as a child, I would watch him play every night at home. My teenage years were spent at concerts and not just one concert a month - I spent four or five days a week going to jazz, blues, and rock 'n' roll concerts. I never considered myself a talented musician, but I spent most of my time with talented musicians.

303: Do you play any instruments?

CZ: I play the harmonica and I am learning to play the mandolin.

303: What is the most rewarding part of your role as president of City Park Jazz?

CZ: Seeing the kids dance at the shows.

303: What is the most stressful?

CZ: Fundraising is hands-down the most frustrating and challenging aspect of putting on a free concert series.

303: You also emcee the event. Do you enjoy being in the spotlight more, or do you prefer the behind-the-scenes work?

CZ: Emceeing the event is fun and exciting; however I don't look at it as being in the spotlight. We are just using the microphone to get the message out about the behind-the-scenes work. I really enjoy the preparation and planning. It's hard work, but so rewarding when we see thousands of people dancing, singing and enjoying the park.

303: What's the funniest thing you have seen happen on stage?

CZ: Funkiphino played a few years ago and had a bubble machine on stage. Kids kept trying to get on the stage to catch the bubbles, so we had to station guards to keep them off.

303: What would you like to add to City Park Jazz?

CZ: In 2010, we expanded and upgraded our vendor offerings, and this year we are offering a simulcast of our concert that can be streamed online.

303: You truly support the arts in Denver. Are you worried that younger generations won't?

CZ: I don't think that the support of the arts in Denver is an issue with the younger generations. It's evident at our shows each year. We bring in more and more younger-aged people. Last Sunday, my seventeen-year-old daughter, who attends East High School, remarked to me that it seemed like her whole school was in attendance.

303: For someone who's never been to City Park Jazz, can you give any pointers?

CZ: Arrive by 4:45 for the best spots; if you truly love the music, sit by the stage - not on the far lawn. Bring a blanket, an umbrella for those quick Denver afternoon showers, camping chairs and your favorite drink. Leave your problems at home - come, relax and enjoy.



To make donations to City Park Jazz visit <http://www.cityparkjazz.org>.