

## Music festival learns to grow organically in second year

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When starting a music festival, often, the hardest part is establishing the event.

You've got to get performers, volunteers and, most importantly, audience members.

Craig Brenner was able to get all three with last year's inaugural Bloomington Boogies: Blues & Boogie Woogie Piano Festival ending as a wild success.

With sold out shows and an enthusiastic audience, Brenner was in better shape with this year's event, and he asked established music festival organizers for help in making sure it succeeds.

"It's our second time, and we're growing it in several different ways," Brenner said.

Brenner said he reached out to organizers of the annual Lotus Music and Arts Festival for advice. He wanted to find a way to accommodate those who couldn't get tickets last year while making sure he had the volunteer help he needed.

This year, there will be two different shows, doubling the number of seats available to see musicians including Bob Seeley, Sunpie Barnes, Henry Butler, Bill Sims Jr. and Cynthia Girtley.

As with last year's event, music lovers will also have more opportunities to hear the music with both Malibu Grill and Grazie serving as after-hour venues where musicians will entertain people after the show.

There will also be more food trucks offered this year next to the Ivy Tech John Waldron Arts Center for festival attendees to grab some food between shows.

The event kicks off at 1 p.m. Sunday with Bloomington's own Mike Lucas performing free outside the venue followed by the 2 p.m. concert inside the Waldron. At 4:30 p.m., Mr. B (Mike Braun) will play a free show outside the venue before the second concert kicks off at 5:30 p.m. Starting at 8 p.m., performances will begin in the after-hours venues with Liz Pennock & Dr. Blues performing at Grazie! Italiano and David Barry kicking things off at Malibu Grill. As the concert wraps up at the Waldron, performers and audience members will trickle into the restaurants for more fun.

On Monday, the fun will continue at Templeton Elementary with a free concert followed by a piano workshop for students.

"We're trying to make this a festival that gives to the community," Brenner said.

For Brenner, finding talented performers seems easy. As a musician himself, he's known most of the performers for years. Still he's impressed that all are gathered together for one show. Brenner said Henry Butler is considered the best contemporary piano player from New Orleans.

"We're really lucky to get him," Brenner said.

Brenner has been emerging himself in the music of the performers. He's been moved to tears by some of the performances and is impressed with the talent that will soon be in Bloomington. Cynthia Girtley is a longtime gospel singer. "She's so moving when you hear her," Brenner said.

He has a funny story when it comes to Alfred "Uganda" Roberts. Brenner met Roberts back in the 1980s. At the time, Brenner was interested in studying the playings of Professor Longhair, a musician who Roberts performed with. Eventually Brenner sent a performance tape of himself to Roberts and was in disbelief when he actually got a call from Roberts. It took some time for Brenner to realize the phone call was real. "And we became friends after that," Brenner said.

Most of all, Brenner feels inspired by Bob Seeley, who was also at last year's festival. "He's considered the dean of this style of playing," Brenner said.

Seeley will be 88-years-old this year, and Brenner finds the musician inspiring. And fans can't seem to get enough either.

"Being around people like this is inspiring on so many levels," Brenner said.

With tickets going fast for both shows, Brenner knows the audience will be thrilled with this year's line-up.

"It's one piano and 88 keys, but everybody sounds different," he said.

If you go

WHAT: Bloomington Boogies: Blues & Boogie Woogie Piano Festival

WHEN: 2 and 5:30 p.m. Aug. 14.

PERFORMERS: The 2 p.m. concert features Bob Seeley, Henry Butler, Bruce "Sunpie" Barnes, Bill Sims Jr. and Craig Brenner. The 5:30 concert features Bob Seeley, Henry Butler, Cynthia Girtley, Mark "Mr. B" Braun and Ricky Nye.

WHERE: Ivy Tech John Waldron Arts Center, 122 S. Walnut St., Bloomington, with after-hours performances at Grazie! Italiano, 106 W. Sixth St., and Malibu Grill, 106 N. Walnut St.

MORE: Tickets are \$20 in advance. A two-concert pass is \$30 and includes seating in a reserved section for both shows. After-hour events are free. Purchase tickets online at [www.bctboxoffice.com](http://www.bctboxoffice.com) or at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater box office, 114 E. Kirkwood Ave., or by phone at 812-323-3020.

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 **Correction**

The Blues & Boogie Woogie Piano Festival is Sunday, Aug. 14. The day of the week was incorrect in an earlier version of this story and has been edited to be correct.

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