

Free concerts keep summer sounding sweet

By Rosemary Ford

Staff writer

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Free music.

It's a tradition as tied to summer as going to the beach or barbecuing under the hot sun.

All summer long, all around New England, outdoor concerts bring families, neighbors and friends together under the stars to listen to the dulcet sounds of jazz or the booty-shaking grind of pop.

These are not huge stadium shows with pricey tickets and big acts, but rather smaller events put on by communities and private sponsors. And while very soon the final weeks of summer will slip into fall, there is still plenty of time to enjoy an outdoor show at a local park or bandstand.

For many people, the free show outweighs any other consideration — making them willing to come out to hear unfamiliar music at the right price.

"We felt the need for culture, that is our biggest thing," said Elaine Farmer of Londonderry, who helps organize the outdoor concerts on the common that audiences have been enjoying in that community for the past six years.

Farmer remembers attending similar concerts as a child, so she was gratified on a recent Monday night to look around and see families enjoying the sounds of Funkpod, a band made up of Londonderry High students.

"It's a fun family thing to do," said Farmer, who watched the show with many of her neighbors in a folding chair. People were surrounded by coolers, chairs and blankets. And when the band took a break between sets, the appreciative audience members broke out the Frisbees.

Band members appreciated the picnic atmosphere.

"It's really fun, the crowd is enjoying it," said 17-year-old Alex Finn of Londonderry, who last played the common in 2005. "It's really cool to get out here and play for all our friends and the whole town."

The audience was a mix of teens who knew the musicians, along with their family members, as well as other people with no connection to the band.

"I am surprised high school kids are interested in this music," said Keith MacFadgen of Londonderry concerning the jazz leanings of Funkpod.

Organizers around the Merrimack Valley say surprises abound at such outdoor concerts. While most are held at a park or common, some take to the streets.

Every Wednesday, for instance, a musician can be heard at 1 p.m. on Appleton Way in Lawrence during the city's Farmer's Market. On some Thursday evenings — weather permitting — visitors also can hear free concerts through Lawrence's Traveling Cafe initiative.

These shows are designed to lure locals to the music, hoping they'll stay and connect with the shops and restaurants Lawrence has to offer, too.

"When people hear the beat, the music, it brings (them) in," said organizer Karen Wood, about a recent Farmer's Market show. "Even when it rained, we went inside and dropped the windows. It was heard all over the street and brought people in wanting to know what was going on."

A sampling of the free concerts in the area:

ANDOVER

The Park on Chestnut Street, 6 p.m.

r Aug. 13: Peking and the Mystics, (a Capella hits)

r Aug. 20: Quintessential Brass (jazz/pop)

GEORGETOWN

The Kiwanis Ice House Performing Arts Pavilion, American Legion Park, off Prospect Street, 5 p.m. In case of rain, concerts will be held at the same time at Penn Brook Elementary School, Elm Street.

r Aug. 10: Route 97 North (classic rock)

r Aug. 17: Battle of the Bands., Georgetown,

HAMPTON BEACH

Music at the Seashell Stage on Ocean Boulevard, 7 p.m, every night, now through Labor Day.

LAWRENCE

Farmer's Market Concerts, Appleton Way, between Essex and Common streets, 1 to 2 p.m.

r Aug. 20: Brian Quirk

r Aug. 27: Dixie Hot Four

Traveling Cafes

5:30 p.m., locations as listed

r Aug. 14: Baritone Robert Honeysucker, Aine Minogue (harpist), Lawrence History Center courtyard.

r Aug. 28: Roots Nation (reggae), The Essex Art Center.

Sept. 18: Edwin Pabon & Orchestra (salsa music and dancing), Campagnone Common.

LONDONDERRY

Londonderry Town Common, corner of Mammoth and Pillsbury roads, 7 p.m.

r Aug. 11: Brian Templeton (blues).

METHUEN

Greycourt Park, behind City Hall, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

r Aug. 20: Donna Byrne, a vocalist with the Marshall Wood Quartet,

NEWBURYPORT

Waterfront Park, behind the Firehouse Center for the Arts, downtown, 6 p.m.

r Aug. 15: Mollie's Misfits (Celtic).

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Photos



Londonderry residents Keith MacFadgen and Kaden Stone, 3, have fun at the Funkpod show. Staff photo



Peking and the Mystics are from left: David Pratt of Wellesley, Tim Vaill of Andover, Chris Parker of Lynnfield, Gene Blake of Andover and Andrew Cranin of Acton. Courtesy photo



Tom Barthelmes of Londonderry performs with Funkpod . Staff photo



From left Ryan Cornelissen, Ross Daly, and Tom Barthelmes rock out with Funkpod during a concert on Londonderry Common. Staff photo