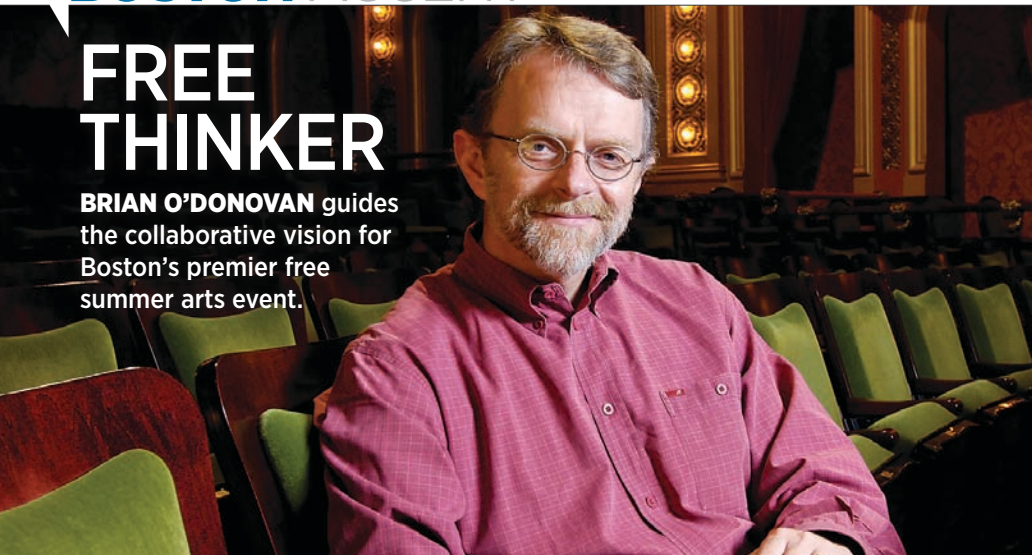


FREE THINKER

BRIAN O'DONOVAN guides the collaborative vision for Boston's premier free summer arts event.



WGBH HOST BRIAN O'DONOVAN WAS the natural pick as the artistic director of the Boston Summer Arts Weekend. Now in its third year under his consistent artistic vision, the festival is a gift: a two-day affair of free musical performances and fine arts in the heart of the city.

Under the glistering façade of the John Hancock Tower on one side and the magnificent Boston Public Library on the other, Copley Square is one of the most iconic public spaces in Boston. “I call it a ‘character in our play,’ it’s that important,” O’Donovan says about the Back Bay locale.

Since its beginnings, the Summer Arts Weekend has been the ultimate melding of the minds. “We didn’t want to just put on a concert,” he says. “We wanted to put together a series of musical ambassadors of their own particular genres that would, as a whole, be broadly appealing and artistically interesting, and somewhat different. It’s a chance for people to discover music they may not yet know they like, or are interested in.”

The challenge for a creation of this caliber—a large-scale, free-of-charge live performance—is making it sustainable, and the support for the project is generated through venerable sponsors and partnerships. “We needed the artistic approach of WGBH, business approach of *The Boston Globe* and the altruistic approach of Citizens Bank, a big commercial entity that

really wants to give back and contribute to the quality of life in the City of Boston. It’s the perfect combination for us.”

The entire weekend—from noon ‘til night—is stocked with incomparable (and a few unusual) music acts, and Saturday evening is one of the best times to see and be seen in Copley Square. “Live music is really where it’s at,” says O’Donovan. “Live music is going to communicate to you in a way that nothing else can, and that includes radio, includes what I do for a living.”

This year’s lineup mixes the American tap/Irish step dance group The StepCrew with the Soul Rebels’ dynamic hip-hop take on a New Orleans brass-band and the Tex-Mex rock ‘n’ roll of Los Lobos, among others. It’s an incredible grouping expected to attract thousands to the city. With the crowd on its way,

SUMMER ARTS WEEKEND

July 26 & 27 at Copley Square, summerartsweekend.com. Free admission.

are there any insider tips or tricks to know? “Bring a blanket,” says O’Donovan. “Or a lawn chair.” Make a weekend of it! Take advantage of great hotel accommodations and dine at some of the city’s most exciting restaurants.

“Art is art for art’s sake,” O’Donovan says. “Come and open your ears and hearts, and you’ll be given something at the festival that will really resonate with you.” —*Samantha DiMauro*