

# Either Orchestra plays big Happy Birthday

Phil Drew  
The Record

The occasion is a celebration of the past, but it is also a look ahead to the future.

The Boston-based jazz ensemble Either/Orchestra, a cutting-edge group that has been hailed by a Chicago Tribune critic as "the future of big-band music" — will perform an open-air free concert in Troy's Prospect Park to celebrate a significant, if overlooked, civic milestone.

The orchestra's appearance is the last in a series of events celebrating the centennial of the 80-acre park, designed by Garnet Baltimore, the first African-American graduate of nearby Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Perched on the Mount Ida heights above downtown Troy, astride Congress Street, the park commands a panoramic 20-mile view to the south and west of the city.

In the winter, it's justly celebrated as one of the best sledding hills in the Northeast, but in the summer months, it is a precious urban greensward featuring exotic and non-native species of trees, from catalpa to magnolia.

In the summer, it is also a haven for picnicking, al fresco outings, and beginning last summer, thanks to the sponsorship of the not-for-profit Friends of Prospect Park, music.

"We started celebrating the centennial in the spring," says the Friends' Moira Rienzo.

They collaborated with the Rensselaer County Historical Society on an exhibit, slated to run at the historical society through September, of artifacts related to the park.

The Friends have also sponsored walking tours of the park; a bike tour beginning and ending at the park that encompassed other such public spaces in the city as Frear Park and Oakwood Cemetery; a modeled display of "Tennis Fashions of the Last Century," and four concerts in the park, including the Zucchini Brothers, Andy the Music Man Morse, the Empire State Youth Percussion Ensemble and a steel-drum band sponsored by Schenectady's Hamilton Hill Arts Center — all performing under the shelter of a tent near the park's playground.

"This is actually the finale of it all," says Rienzo of next week's

Either/Orchestra appearance. "And we're expecting it to be a big event. We had concerts last summer with local acts, but because this year is the centennial, we wanted to expand it. We wanted something different, that we hadn't had before."

And that would be Either/Orchestra. An ever-changing 10-piece ensemble founded in 1985 — "We've had at least 50 members over the years," says founder Russ Gershon — they are "definitely rooted in jazz, and we have played music in every different jazz style, from swing to avant garde."

"In the last 10 years or so, we've played more music with Afro-Cuban influences, and we've also worked with Ethiopian music. Definitely, a variety of African and Caribbean influences. Our last recording was recorded in Ethiopia, and it was sort of long, sprawling songs, lots of guest artists."

They have spent much of last winter and spring in the recording studio, laying down a new CD with more of Gershon's originals on it.

"This one is shorter, tighter, more pop music, I mean for us," says Gershon. "I don't think a lot of people would hear us and say, 'that's pop music'."

The new CD is likely to be released early next year. "I'm shooting for January," says Gershon. "I'm not too sure I'm gonna make it."

The ensemble has long been dedicated to live performances far and wide, in clubs and concert halls and festivals, including performances from Africa to Europe to Canada, but their sojourn in the studio has taken them out of their stride.

The Prospect Park performance, which will feature some of their newly recorded material, is something of a coming-out party for fresh touring, including an upcoming gig in the Boston exurbs, at the Somerville Theatre. Beyond that, "We don't have a big, formal tour planned, but we'll be playing a lot around the Northeast."

Co-sponsoring the Prospect con-

cert is North Troy's Sanctuary for Independent Media, an increasingly prominent venue for avant-garde music, which will be launching a new jazz series this year.

"We actually played at the

Sanctuary last summer, and we just loved playing there," says Gershon. "What a great space! And the audience (in Troy) was shockingly attentive. It was a very special gig."

"This summer, when we were looking for new gigs, I got in touch with Steve Pierce at the Sanctuary and said, what's going on? He set us up with this gig, and we jumped at it." □

## HOLY COW, IT'S THE WASHINGTON COUNTY FAIR!

Monday, August 20-  
Sunday, August 26

### What's Happening?

**Monday** - Fair Opens @ 5pm • 5 mile run to The Fair • Demolition Derby  
Smokey Greene (music)

**Tuesday** - Carnival Fun Day (Ride 11am-11pm for \$20) • Garden Tractor Pull  
The Refrigerators (music)

**Wednesday** - Senior Citizens Day (\$4 admission - today only) • Antique Tractor Pull  
The Front Porch Pickers (music)

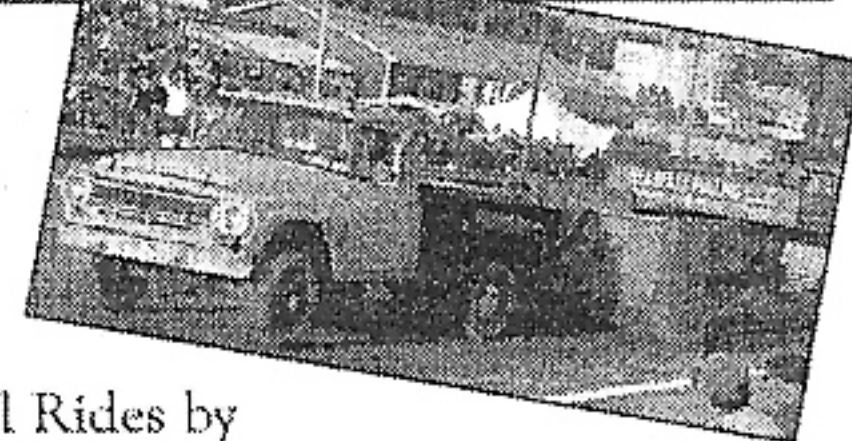
**Thursday** - Children's Day (Students High School & Younger - FREE) • 4WD Truck Pull  
Pepsi Giveaway (drawing for 3 bicycles)

**Friday** - Out of Field Tractor Pull  
Fritz's Polka Band (music)

**Saturday** - NYTPA Sanctioned Tractor Pull • The Robinson Family (music)

**Sunday** - ATV Pull • Big Rig Semi-Truck Pull • Carnival Fun Day (ride 11am-11pm for \$20)  
The Robinson Family (music)

And much more...!



Carnival Rides by



Farm Fun for  
the Family!

- \*More than 2000 Farm & Animal Exhibits
- \* Live Entertainment Every Day
- \* Motorsports \* Agriculture



Route 29 • Greenwich, N.Y.

[www.washingtoncountyfair.com](http://www.washingtoncountyfair.com)

**WHAT** Either Orchestra

**WHERE** Prospect Park,  
Congress Street, Troy

**WHEN** 6:30 p.m.  
Tuesday

**ADMISSION** Free □

Washington County

Where life is the journey.

Washington County Tourism Association

363 Broadway, Fort Edward, NY 12828

Call toll-free 888.203.8622 [www.washingtoncounty.org](http://www.washingtoncounty.org)



Visit our website  
or call  
**692-2464**  
for information.