



Greetings from Idaho

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From: Charlie Washburn

We've been in Boise for only 3 days but it seems like we've accomplished years worth of work. Evelyn Mason, Director of Idaho Parents Unlimited and VSA arts of Idaho has coped graciously with flight delays equipment failures, media events and a seemingly endless stream of requests for everything from toothpaste to a better stand-up bass. What she has to show for it is a newly minted team of musicians, and access artists (ASL, audio description, captioning and a painter) ready for tonight's premier inclusive production of the Henry Butler Trio at the Gene Harris Jazz Festival.



I could hardly be more excited by the process we've been through. Sharing the concept of an inclusive performance and coaching the team to bring it all together at yesterday's rehearsal makes me positive that we are onto something great and that we can really change the face of inclusion of people with disabilities in the performing arts while improving the experience for everyone.

Here's a quick look. Randy Jamison from Idaho is painting at the rehearsal above (and he's already sold the painting). JO Welch is interpreting with Henry Butler at the piano in the photo to the right and Celia Hughes is preparing her Audio Description for the big show in the photo below.



The Henry Butler Concert at the Gene Harris Festival was a huge success. While I won't say that producing an inclusive Blues event "on the fly", as it were, was easy, it was more than worth the effort.

Seeing the animation in the faces of the group of concert goers with little or no vision when Henry Butler cued the audio describer to give us all the benefit of Celia Hughe's remarkable visual perception was worth the whole effort. For most people in the room, including the folks with low vision it was their first experience with audio description.



The music itself was phenomenal. A high energy jazz that wound its way into New Orleans Blues. While we were in an arena setting the close up video shots let you feel like you were walking around on stage. The acoustic quality achieved by the tech crew was nearly flawless (and that's a high compliment coming from me, a roadie at heart). I was also captivated by watching the tables full of ASL speakers discuss the progress of the mural and exploring the nuances of the music being relayed by the creative interpretation of JO Welch. To say they were thoroughly entertained does not do the experience justice.

The painter, describer and ASL interpreter were nearly as celebrated as Henry himself at the reception afterward....even being asked to give autographs.

The Gene Harris Festival director took me aside afterwards and told me that opening up the festival through inclusive production features created the largest Club Night crowd in their 10 year history (about 900 people I'd say...200 or more having come specifically because of our efforts at inclusion) and that the media critics and University sponsors who had been down of the event and questioning the direction it was going in have changed their tune and are celebrating the festival's efforts to build an inclusive community.

Good stuff is happening here. I'm more convinced than ever that as people experience concerts that are inclusive by design we are raising the bar and setting a new artistic standard that will change how people think about the performing arts.

