

After a rainy start, the curtain goes up on Make Music Madison



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Make Music Madison, the city's first summer solstice music festival, had a rough start Friday, with gusty winds and heavy rains. But by afternoon, the weather changed its tune for scores of musicians and hundreds of audience members.

Small pockets of listeners formed at spots throughout the city. Outside the Orpheum Theater Friday evening, Michael Trevis played his solo acoustic guitar to an

audience of about 20 people. Down the street, six members of the Shabazz High School fiddle class played lively tunes while seated on park benches and even the sidewalk, entertaining passers-by.

"It's really fun. It's a great idea," said the fiddle group's leader, Shabazz teacher Gene Delcourt. Earlier in the day, the fiddlers had performed along the bike path near Sherman Terrace, where many two-wheeled commuters stopped to listen, he said.

"Beginner kids don't get to play that much in public. I hope this really catches on and continues," Delcourt said.

Close to 500 cities around the world celebrate the official start of summer with a music festival, a concept first launched by the French government in Paris in 1982 as Fete de la Musique. The inaugural year of Make Music Madison, run primarily by volunteers, was bolstered by \$25,000 from the city.

"It's a way for me to learn about groups I wouldn't have known about," said Christine Hartelt, who watched several performances Friday. "It's a nice gift to the city and residents of the city."

Madison residents Theresa Stabo and Jeff Schimpff took in a free harmonica lesson on Capitol Square Friday evening before biking over to the Overture Center loading dock to hear rock band TL;DR perform on a sophisticated sound stage.

"It's very fun. I'm not a musician, so I really appreciate the music that other people make," Stabo said.

Morning thunderstorms put a damper on some of the day's early events. Most of the 110 planned venues for Make Music Madison had on-site rain shelters, designated by a blue raindrop icon on the event's brochure. However, because of a glitch on the organization's

website, some artists and fans were not able to find one another when a show had to move.

"I had to log on to my own personal account to see where we were performing," said Craig Newton of Most Wednesday Nights Session Band. He and his fellow Irish music performers were originally supposed to play at noon at Bernie's Beach and relocated to the Olin Park Pavilion.

Elizabeth Simcock, a member of the Make Music Madison organizing team, said rain locations were supposed to be listed online but "a glitch in the system" prevented the alternative locations from being displayed.

Despite the rainy start, Simcock was optimistic.

"It's a crazy event to start with," she said. "But we have a good attitude about whatever happens, happens, and it's all going to be OK."

Despite their relocation, three members of the Most Wednesday Nights Session Band whipped out their instruments, sat tucked away from the wind and began their jam session.

"We're always excited," Jeanna Schultz said lightheartedly, looking at the empty picnic tables and a lone duck waddling past. "Even with no audience."

The scene at Bernie's Beach was much different by 7:30 p.m., when about 60 people had spread out on picnic blankets and lawn chairs to hear the Not Quite Yesterday/No Name String Band.

Having a rain shelter helped bring together a crowd of about 100 people for music presented at the Madison Children's Museum, said the museum's director of education, Kia Karlen.

"There were very few (performers) that canceled because of the rain," said Michael Rothschild, who has spearheaded Make Music Madison for the past year. "Given the complexity of the whole thing, I'm pleased at how well it all ran."

The weather-driven contrasts were easy to see in south Madison, where a piano sitting outside Madison Fire Station No. 6 was draped in a blue rain tarp. The piano has been meant to provide an "open mic" for anyone who wanted to play it.

Just a block from the lonely piano, however, dozens of people listened to the energetic music of the Limanya Drum and Dance Ensemble as it performed in a parking lot near the South District police station.

"People are loving it," said Ron Schutz, who with Linda Hall was driving from performance to performance Friday night to see as many Make Music Madison acts as possible. "There's just a lot of joy."