

## **2017 Lotus festival includes old favorites, new appearances**

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On Tuesday night, the Lotus Education and Arts Foundation's board of directors had something to celebrate. They'd met their sponsorship goal for the 2017 Lotus World Music and Arts Festival.

It was a brief celebration, board chairman Rob Shakespeare said. They still had plenty of work to do before this year's event, which starts Thursday night. But the ability to garner support from businesses and organizations in the community is one of the things that makes Lotus tick, he said. "The goal is to keep tickets affordable and also provide free experiences for those who can't buy a ticket."

Free events this year include Saturday's Lotus in the Park, with free live music, workshops, crafts and demonstrations; the Festival Arts Village, featuring activities, installations and live demonstrations; and the Festival Parade, led by the Raya Brass Band. They'll play their mix of Balkan brass music with an urban edge during the parade as well as in concerts Friday and Saturday for their Lotus debut. The festivities start at 8:30 at the corner of Seventh and Washington streets.

Sunni Fass, the foundation's executive director, said the parade is different from what some who haven't been to a Lotus parade in past years might expect. Participants can grab a flag, wear a mask and dance along with the band all the way to the Buskirk-Chumley Theater on Kirkwood Avenue.

"It's more of a procession than a parade," Fass said. "It's not the kind of parade that you watch from the curb."

Fass has been director since 2014, but she's been involved in Lotus since 2001, when she was a volunteer while studying folklore and ethnomusicology at Indiana University. Each role she's served during the festival has reinforced her beliefs about its importance in Bloomington and the global community.

"One of the most powerful things about Lotus as an organization and as a festival is the way it brings people together," she said. "That is an overarching point of why we exist. I think especially in this particular historical moment, events like Lotus are more valuable and more necessary than ever."

"To bring people together to listen to each other and talk to each other and meet each other through music, and through the arts, and understand that much more about the world we all share — that is absolutely vital."

Those connections are one of the things that make Lotus special to the

Bloomington community and why it's successful. Fass said the success also can be attributed to around 600 volunteers who help with the event. Festivalgoers can find them this year in yellow shirts helping with directions and keeping things running smoothly.

"Lotus has always had a reputation for having a very, very, very well-organized volunteer program," Fass said, "which is really valuable, and I think is part of what keeps people coming back."

And as Bloomington residents and visitors flock downtown for Lotus weekend, artists from around the globe are welcomed into an atmosphere that values their presence and engaging in dialog with people from various cultures.

"In Bloomington, we look forward as a community all year to the Lotus World Music and Arts Festival," Bloomington mayor John Hamilton said in an email statement. "We plan our work, our visitors and our vacations around it. Lotus has become a colorful, delicious, multi-cultural performance banquet that feeds our community's spirit, sustains our optimism and informs our worldview.

"It's the only festival that I can think of with a name that becomes a verb within the community as festival fans ask, 'Are you Lotusing tonight?' Bloomington residents are better because we have The Lotus Festival of the Arts in our city and in our hearts."

### Opening night

The 2017 Lotus World Music and Arts Festival concert features fan favorite Vasen, who Lotus is bringing to Bloomington for the ninth time. Heard on "A Prairie Home Companion," the trio performs Swedish swing music in unique ways.

"The way they put their music together is just incredible, gentle, fluid and completely accessible," said Shakespeare. "That's why they're so popular.

Also at the concert, musician, artist, author and stuntologist Sam Bartlett will present a Lotus Dickey-themed "cranky," a scrolling narrative combining storytelling with art and music. It gives a new take on the the story of Dickey, the Orange County musician who was a partial namesake for the first festival.

The Kick-Off Concert takes place from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. Tickets are \$18 in advance or \$23 day of show.

If you go

WHO: Vasen and Sam Bartlett

WHAT: Thursday Kick-Off Concert

WHEN: 7 p.m. Thursday.

WHERE: Buskirk-Chumley Theater, [114 E. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington.](#)

TICKETS: [www.bctboxoffice.org](http://www.bctboxoffice.org); [812-323-3020](tel:812-323-3020).