

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Community Magic: GrassRoots, the Nationally Prominent, Non-Commercial Music Festival, Makes Music out of Community, and Vice Versa**

*April 24, 2017* - It takes a lot to run a large music festival. But it demands something akin to magic to keep a completely non-profit, non-corporate lynchpin of the Eastern US festival scene cooking. The volunteer-powered Finger Lakes **GrassRoots Festival** of Music and Dance has constantly fed and nurtured its roots: bringing artists deeper into community, and bringing the community together with the arts.

This massive artistic endeavor sprang from an unlikely source: A group of old-time musicians, horrified by the lackluster reaction of authorities to the AIDS crisis. They held a wildly successful benefit, one night back in 1990. Now, after more than two and half decades, this year's **Trumansburg** festival runs **July 20-23, 2017** and will feature 80 acts on four stages over four days.

For GrassRoots co-founder Jeb Puryear, one of the driving forces behind host band Donna the Buffalo, it was never just about a one-off show to raise some money. "We really wanted to get the local bands to be more community oriented. That was the initial idea. We wanted to bring the bands together and remove the entrepreneurial impulse that sullies the waters, then add the idea of benefiting the community."

The spirit of that first night animates the festival to this day: "I remember so clearly the feeling of peeking out from the door of the dressing rooms and seeing the packed house, responding to the call to be there and support a community, a joyful mob," recalls Jordan Puryear, festival coordinator. "To create joy in the midst of crisis brings magic to the table. That event led to the creation of GrassRoots and our years of raising consciousness and funds."

"After that first successful concert, I knew we had to keep going," remarks Jeb. "The resulting core energy of that event was stellar. Then the next thought was that if we made it a festival, it would create ongoing momentum, whereas a single concert doesn't. I enlisted the help of every friend and family member I could to get this going and keep it going."

That approach worked, and the momentum continues to feed the festival's unique spirit. It has kept the community engaged, as thousands of volunteers flock to attend and support the festival. This community orientation is matched with fearless, open-minded curation that has torn down genre boundaries from the festival's first edition. "We wanted to elevate music in the community, music of all kinds," Jeb says.

"Music fests are a dime a dozen nowadays. Yet when GrassRoots started, there weren't too many that weren't genre specific," reflects Nana Monaco, GrassRoots assistant director. "We really have something for everyone. I remember last year when I walked from one stage to the next in the span of a hour and saw zydeco, reggae, bluesy gospel, and an Afrobeat group. People are exposed to all sorts of music."

The connecting thread: GrassRoots bands tend to lean toward the analog, the alternative or counter-mainstream sound. They may have close ties to a tradition or lineage, or powerful messages that stand out from the noise of fervent commercialism. They all tap the magical nexus of art, dance, education, and wellness. “We tend to book bands right before they’ve been discovered. That’s kind of our niche,” Monaco notes. “We do book headliners, but it’s not really about that. Someone might come to see a specific band, but will also leave loving another. GrassRoots is a great place to find your next favorite band.”

They also come to learn. GrassRoots takes the educational facet of its mission very seriously, offering festival goers more than a quick peek or taste, but an extensive schedule of classes, yoga sessions, and other learning opportunities, all free of charge. Fans can immerse themselves in an entire Culture Camp prior to the festival, where they can learn from master artists and eat community meals together. “The culture of the festival isn’t about excessive partying, or passive sitting and listening,” Monaco explains. “It’s fun and positive and about having a good time and getting involved in the proceedings.”

Powered by approximately 1,500 volunteers, GrassRoots is built to get people involved in every aspect of festival operations. “Our community of volunteers really creates something special,” says Monaco. “We have always prided ourselves as being a nationally prominent large music festival, without having major sponsorship. The only way we can do this is with help, and the volunteer opportunities allow anyone to participate, regardless of their income. It creates a larger sense of ownership and connection.”

Volunteers, who help with everything from setup to tear down, have grown together as the festival has grown. As one veteran volunteer, Katie Walker, put it, “GrassRoots is my family, my shining moments and my tireddest hours. It’s where I learned I’m not always right, that I have great ideas, and that I can do anything,” she says. “It’s a reunion. It’s a tribe.”

“GrassRoots is not owned: It’s run, organized, shepherded, but not owned,” adds Jeb. “That collective pulse, creativity, and excitement is what makes this festival. It’s not happening to you, it helps you create something. A lot of people can hire a band, put up a stage and it didn’t mean anything to anyone. But a festival has to live, and I’ve never been anywhere where the atmosphere is as alive as at GrassRoots.”

###