

MEDIA CONTACT: Lisa Carnevale
lisa@myrandagroup.com
401-954-1135
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FirstWorks and City of Providence to host the PROVIDENCE INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL
Citywide celebration with world-class performing arts, sculpture, music, food and spectacle
The signature event builds off of Providence's rich creative community and features internationally acclaimed artists and performers

PROVIDENCE, RI – FirstWorks and The City of Providence announce the **PROVIDENCE INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL** will take place on **June 11-14, 2015**. Building off of Providence's international recognition as a creative city, this first-ever signature event will be a jaw-dropping celebration featuring world-class arts, sculpture, music, food and spectacle in the heart of the city's downtown. **The centerpiece of Festival activities is Saturday, June 13, 2015 with events beginning on Kennedy Plaza at 4pm.** From the largest stringed instrument on the planet, to the undisputed Queen of African Music, to the Grammy Award-winning ambassador of Mali, to visual transformations of city streets with murals, tape art, and photography, the Providence International Arts Festival will light up Rhode Island's capital city over four days, and engage a diverse international audience.

"This festival will be a way to connect the world-class talent we have here in Providence with artists and performers from around the world," said Mayor of Providence Jorge Elorza, "We are excited to welcome visitors to the City to explore all that we have to offer and look forward to partnering with so many great organizations and artists."

The Providence International Arts Festival will literally transform the city with international artists in visual art, sculpture, music, public art, civic dialogue, educational workshops, community play, spectacle and parade. The Festival will be centralized around program hubs that unify the downtown into an arts corridor – PVD City Hall, FirstWorks on the Plaza, Public Art Transformations, Empire Street Gateway, and the

Washington Street Corridor. Opening ceremonies will feature a specially commissioned first work, *One Voice* by Dr. Clarice LaVerne Thompson with **RPM Voices of Rhode Island** and a stunning 800 voices in a procession to City Hall from all points of the compass to kick-off the festivities at 6pm on Saturday, June 13, 2015.

“This festival will be a spectacular convergence of art and music, transformation and ideas - tying the hyper local extraordinary talent with internationally renowned artists and gems on the global arena to spark the imagination and streets of Providence and beyond,” stated Kathleen Pletcher, Executive Artistic Director of FirstWorks, Festival co-producer and a Providence-based nonprofit organization that brings world-class performing and visual artists and unique “firsts” to Rhode Island.

On June 13th the **FirstWorks on the Plaza** programming features a complete takeover of Kennedy Plaza and Burnside Park, the city’s central transportation hub in the downtown core. Central to this event hub is **Earth Harp** (California) the largest stringed instrument on the planet. Part sculpture, part instrument, and part architecture, long golden strings stretched as much as 1,000 feet, will run from Providence’s most iconic skyscraper– the “Superman” building, and be played by the Earth Harp Collective’s inventor William Close. Scores of local school children will participate in a Community Play on Friday, June 12. “Kennedy Plaza and 111 Westminister have always had a connection and now we will be linked with piano wire to support the Providence International Arts Festival. We are proud to support the City of Providence and FirstWorks in this creative way and look forward to the festival in June,” said David Sweetser, principal, High Rock Development.

A wide range of musical performers, including two world-music powerhouses, are featured at the FirstWorks on the Plaza hub: the “undisputed Queen of African Music” **Angélique Kidjo** (Benin-exile), and **Oumou Sangaré**, Mali’s great diva and a Grammy Award-winning ambassador of her country’s unique Wassoulou musical tradition. Sangaré will perform with long-time collaborator, Mali native **Sidy Maiga** (Providence resident), a master drummer, on the Providence Rink stage. A stage with local salsa bands and guest artists from, **Bixiga 70** (São Paulo Brazil) will have crowds dancing in the streets. And **Squonk Opera** (Pittsburgh), performs *Pneumatica*, an outdoor musical spectacle about air, made of air, and powered by air— is the latest opus of this “multimedia troupe of infinite jest”.

Public Art Transformations will happen throughout the city, spearheaded by **The Avenue Concept** (Providence), a top emerging arts organization marrying public art and the civic realm. As a lead Festival

Creative Partner, The Avenue Concept, will create ephemeral art on public walls during the Festival, including a special installation by the recognized **Tape Art** (Providence) as well as two large-scale mural projects with outstanding international street artists, **Etam Cru** and **Natalia Rak** (Europe) which will remain as a permanent art work in the downtown area. In addition the Avenue Concept is supporting the creation of small scale 2D and 3D art installations along Washington St. and partnering with the Dean Hotel to create an **Interactive Skate Park and Sculpture Lounge**, featuring local DJs and food on the parking lot located between Washington St. and Fountain St.

The Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, RI State Council on the Arts and RI Council on the Humanities have teamed up to present “Providence Portraits” stunning images of the city’s people in the public sphere, as public artist and photographer **Mary Beth Meehan** (Rhode Island) installs her giant images made throughout Providence neighborhoods on the sides of buildings along Washington Street, transforming the built environment with dramatic imagery.

The Festival is funded with lead support from an *Our Town* grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, GTECH, and the RI Foundation. Additional support is gratefully acknowledged from Alex & Ani, Coastway Bank, Narragansett Beer, Textron, University Orthopedics, and the Providence Tourism Council.

Two RFP’s have been announced to catalyze local participation: one for performances on the Community Stages on Washington Street and Burnside Park and a second for public art interventions/installations. Providence’s Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, along with FirstWorks have convened local organizations to collaborate on festival concepts and planning since December 2013.

A full schedule of artists and happenings will be released in early May 2015. Up-to-the-minute information will be found at www.first-works.org beginning April 1, 2015. In the meantime, contact FirstWorks at 401-421-4278 or info@first-works.org.

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About FirstWorks

FirstWorks brings exceptional world-class performing arts experiences to Rhode Island, impacting the cultural, educational, and economic vitality of the community. Launched in 2004, as a turn-around of First Night Providence, FirstWorks has since produced 23 groundbreaking arts festivals and programs that attracted more than 175,000 participants, and presented over 60 premiere performances. FirstWorks has offered Rhode Islanders unprecedented access to some of the most exciting artists of this time, including Yo-Yo Ma & the Silk Road Ensemble, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Wynton Marsalis,

Joffrey Ballet, and international masters from the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The FirstWorks Arts Learning Program works with over 30 public and charter schools across Rhode Island to provide students, particularly those from underserved communities, direct connection with world-class performing artists and creative thinkers. In 2012, FirstWorks and the City of Providence hosted their pilot FirstWorks Festival on the Plaza, which attracted 40,000 visitors and generated \$1.4 million in economic impact. This June, FirstWorks is expanding its 10-year partnership with the City to host the Providence International Arts Festival, transforming the newly renovated hub of the city into an exciting four-day performing arts experience. Visit www.first-works.org to learn more.

About Providence's Department of Art, Culture and Tourism

Established in 2003, the Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism (AC+T) ensures the continued development of a vibrant and creative city by integrating arts and culture into community life while showcasing Providence as an international cultural destination. Visit <http://providenceri.com/ArtCultureTourism>.