

Rick DellaRatta and Jazz for Peace
*Promoting Jazz & Philanthropy: More Than 800 Performances,
Fundraising For Over 700 Organizations in Eight Years*

Celebrating its eighth anniversary in 2010, Jazz For Peace pursues a mission of “Uniting people through the art form of Jazz” as it states on their website. A milestone in the development of Jazz For Peace occurred on September 25, 2002 in New York City, when Rick DellaRatta and Jazz for Peace performed at the United Nations. Leading a band composed of Israeli, Palestinian and American musicians, they performed a concert for an international audience. This event opened the doors to the benefit concert series that has continued to raise funds, publicity and awareness for over 700 non-profit organizations. Attended and enjoyed by ambassadors, celebrities, humanitarians and music fans all over the world, the efforts of Jazz For Peace have garnered the attention, support and praise from such leaders as President Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Senator John McCain, activist Noam Chomsky, Ed Begley Jr., New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and others. The mission of Jazz for Peace is to continue the benefit concert series; to expand its performances to other cities, states and countries; to bring jazz back into the schools and expose Americans to one of its greatest, yet often overlooked art forms; and to donate musical instruments to underprivileged children and schools. In March 2007 jazz pianist, vocalist and composer Rick DellaRatta was included by The Foundation Center in their list of the top musician philanthropists of our time, side-by-side with Bono (U2), Elton John, Peter Gabriel and Sting.

Interview with John De Angelis, Grant Administrator, Jazz For Peace

By Joe Patitucci

JJ: Could you discuss how the organization Jazz For Peace developed from initial concept into an active organization?

JFP: Jazz for Peace started out as a poem written by our founder, jazz singer, pianist, composer Rick DellaRatta, on the roof of his east village apartment building overlooking the events on the morning of 9/11. The poem was recited by Rick at a concert at the Savannah Jazz Festival only two weeks later where he was performing with his trio including Eddie Gomez and Lenny White, and then put to music and performed by his Quartet [Gomez, White, Paquito D’Rivera] the following week in Troy, NY. From these powerful and resonating words and music which can be found at the Jazz For Peace website: (www.jazzforpeace.org/article/troylive&lively.htm , <http://www.jazzforpeace.com/troyarticle.htm>) came an invite some months later from the United Nations to lead a multi cultural Jazz band which consisted of American, Israeli and Palestinian musicians as well as musicians from other continents as well. This then led to regular performances in New York City, which then led to a benefit concert series to help outstanding causes and strengthen our communities. This benefit concert series was later augmented by an education series and an instrument donation program to help underprivileged children and was eventually expanded across the United States and is now being expanded across the world with recent events in Europe, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Africa and more. Over the past few weeks alone we have received inquiries from Pakistan, India, and China.

JJ: How is the organization Jazz For Peace unique from other organizations in jazz and in the realm of philanthropy?

JFP: For starters its origins stem from a unique moment in American history. Its reaction to both that moment as well as the general direction of our world created the opportunity to use world class culture in the form of America’s greatest gift - Jazz, to “Help those who are helping others” in a way that simply was never done before. It is because there *wasn’t* a Jazz for Peace as it exists today, that one had to be created. And it is that need for something that previously did not exist due to the changing direction of our world that set the stage for something new and unique - so much so it was recently granted patent pending status by the United States Patent and Trademark Office for its model.

JJ: How are you teaching people to fish rather than giving them the fish?

JFP: The basic mindset of charitable and philanthropic giving, up until now, has primarily been based around specific financial awards often described as “grants” or “donations”. However this concept is flawed in what many now believe to be the majority of cases. That is because this concept has created a vicious cycle of dependency. You don’t have to look very far to find once outstanding missions that have not only degenerated into becoming merely “dog and pony shows” for their funders, but are also ready to cut whatever little services they still provide at a moments notice should anything at all happen to the specific funding source they now so desperately depend on. Jazz for Peace seeks to provide an intervention - a chance for the public to simultaneously embrace culture over pure entertainment, along with a worthy cause over trivial and sometimes even tabloid-esque media. Jazz For Peace provides a chance for an organization to grow in more organic and sustainable ways by not only being better funded, but also more publicized, more sponsored, more supported, more befriended, more prestigious, and thru the sharing of the information from our combined previous events – more knowledgeable as well. Jazz For Peace provides an opportunity for everyone involved to embrace our greatest qualities collectively such as creativity, artistry, humanity, spirituality, intelligence etc., as the poem says, for the purpose of raising our total conscience and leading us towards the true meaning of peace – enlightenment. We endeavor to help organizations who wish to be freed from the shackles and potential perils of their current financial dependency. And it is this combination that has the very real potential to lead those who receive it on a path towards being fed for life – not just for a day.

JJ: How do you envision expansion of Jazz For Peace - in terms of fundraising and expanding a roster of artists and performances over time?

JFP: While this might sound a bit idealistic in today’s society – it is our hope that by providing a service that is overwhelmingly obvious in both importance and value to mankind, that we will eventually attract people who would like to help us raise funds not only for others, but for our own services as well.

JJ: What are the long range plans of Jazz For Peace?

JFP: We hope that by staying humble, staying focused, and continually trying to improve that we will not only continue what we do, but be able to do it bigger and better for the organizations, institutions and children that we serve.

JJ: What are the biggest challenges that face the organization?

JFP: In one of the strangest of all catch-22’s many organizations that are in need of our funding services simply don’t know that we exist. Naturally we don’t know who they are either and hence many of our applicants and recipients often say that they wish they had heard about us sooner. Some people that have heard of us erroneously think that because we have the word “Jazz” in our name that we *only* fund the arts or other Jazz organizations and assume they wouldn’t qualify.

JJ: Give us an idea of how a single concert or performance might be booked?

JFP: The first thing for us is to receive the application which organizations can fill out from our web-site. From there is the approval process. And from there we build the Empowerment Tree which is completely unique for each recipient.

JJ: How does a single performance activity traditionally translate into fundraising?

JFP: Fund-raising, publicity-raising, awareness-raising, creating new long term partnerships and sponsors for our recipients, etc. all comes from the empowerment tree that we “Grow” for our recipients. The empowerment tree can be found at www.jazzforpeace.org/tree. Grants are specially designed to help a wide variety of causes.

JFP: While most grants are spectacularly narrow in focus with extraordinary guidelines that can easily disqualify, the Empowerment Grant has helped organizations as diverse as Insight Breast Cancer, Boston Arts After School, and Family Services of Greater New Orleans just to name a few.

JJ: What processes brought about the support of Jazz For Peace by President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Senator John McCain, Philosopher Noam Chomsky, actor Ed Begley Jr., New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg consumer activist Ralph Nader and others?

JFP: While ultimately it's the music that makes people lifetime fans of Jazz for Peace, an elected official is also technically a public servant. And I would guess that any elected official who is truly dedicated views himself as such. Many other prestigious people are also public service minded and it makes perfect sense for these people to quickly and easily relate to the public service mindedness of the mission and work of Jazz for Peace. However I should also confess that many of them are also big fans of the music of Rick DellaRatta and have become friends of his as well. An example that comes to mind is when Ed Begley Jr. attended a concert in Los Angeles. He made it a point to come backstage and say how much he loved the music, then he decided to stay for the second show and when the place refilled itself with people he actually went onstage completely unannounced to tell the people how much he loved the music they were about to hear and what an incredible show they were in store for. So it's definitely a combination of the mission and the music!

JJ: Could you discuss the "Empowerment Tree" and how or why this method of fundraising is innovative?

JFP: By "Empowering" the recipient via all of the branches and components that make up our Empowerment Tree *in addition* to raising funds, we are now doing something much more along the lines of feeding a person for life than for a day.

Visit Jazz For Peace on the internet at www.JazzForPeace.org