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PIONEER COURTHOUSE SQUARE EXTENDS ITS PUBLIC PROGRAMMING THROUGH SUMMER 2021

Polka Dot Downtown, a performance art installation in "Portland's Living Room," continues to connect the community and pays \$150,000 to local artists hard hit by the pandemic

PORTLAND, Ore. – (June 8, 2021) – Portland’s iconic Pioneer Courthouse Square, often referred to as “Portland’s Living Room,” announced the extension of programming through Summer 2021 with the art installation and performance series, Polka Dot Downtown. Outdoor pop-up performances are taking place throughout Portland's downtown core, giving people in the community opportunities to come to the center of the city that they know and love, as Portland begins to reopen and recover.

The pandemic required every business and non-profit organization in the city to get creative and pivot this past year. Pioneer Courthouse Square was no exception. In a typical year, Portland’s central gathering place would see 11 million diverse visitors and host more than 250 free community events.

“Our parks and open spaces have not only provided moments of escape, but they have reminded us of the crucial places they occupy in the lives of Portlanders – and more broadly Oregonians,” said Jennifer Polver, Executive Director, Pioneer Courthouse Square. “Polka Dot Downtown has allowed us to safely invite people to experience the Square and Downtown Portland in a new way while simultaneously providing a venue for local artists since most Portland performance spaces are closed. In our 37th year, the Square is quite possibly more important now than ever.”

Polka Dot Downtown was created by local artist Bill Will in collaboration with the Square. It was originally designed to uniquely respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19. Since its launch in July 2020, 217 polka dots have been installed at 41 iconic downtown properties, setting the stage for more than 332 performances by 614 artists, musicians, singers, and dancers to date. Each colorful 12-foot vinyl dot adhered to the red brick surface of the Square and on sidewalks throughout downtown acts as a simple stage.



"It is both a playful idea and a deeply meaningful artistic concept. The dots allow people to safely gather and connect in the heart of Portland, the cultural hub of the region. When the Square was founded in the 1980s, our downtown was under stress and faced similar challenges to those we encounter today. The future of downtown was in question. The city and the people that cared about Portland wanted to bring good energy to the Downtown and creating Pioneer Courthouse Square was a pivotal moment for moving it into a brighter future," said Paul Andrews, Executive Committee Member of the non-profit Pioneer Courthouse Square board. "The Square is committed to playing an ongoing role in the recovery of Downtown Portland in the months and years ahead. We still love this city, and we will continue the Square's core purpose, to enrich and help unite the City. To do that, we are entrusting Portland's artists and giving them a stage to help us create the honest human connection we all need."

Performances occur on the brightly colored polka dots in the Square, emanate through Downtown Portland, and span musical genre and artistic discipline. The [Spring/Summer 2021 Schedule](#) highlights include 6-8 performances each week ranging from curated celebrations of cultural groups to musicians, acrobatic displays, and dancing. Performers include:

Machado Mijiga. The multi-instrumental jazz fusion groove master composed 25 pieces for 25 separate drummers in the Summer of 2020 and produced the track, *Ingenious*, with collaborators.

Portland Opera. Performers connect us through stories and song. The Portland Opera has been enhancing the cultural landscape of the beautiful Pacific Northwest since 1964.

Jermaine. His charismatic energy and passion for music is a dynamic force to witness on stage from smooth vocals backed by upbeat funk-soul.

Piano. Push. Play. This organization rescues pianos and reintroduces them on the streets, inviting all pianists to come and tickle the ivories.

A-WOL Dance Collective. The physicality of the movement of these performers both on the ground and in the air conveys striking fearlessness and unmistakable rigor.

ICA India Festival. Portland's largest annual celebration of Indian culture, timed to celebrate India's Independence Day, as one example of the cultural performances scheduled.

The program has paid a total of \$150,000 to-date to the performers participating in the Polka Dot Downtown series.

There are numerous ways to experience and interact with the installation of Polka Dot Downtown, limited only by a visitor's imagination. A few initial suggestions include:

- Drop-in on upcoming performances, which are listed at <http://thesquarepdx.org/our-events>
- Bring a family member or meet a friend for coffee
- Purchase a meal at one of the [food carts](#) in the square and have your lunch on a dot
- Snap a family photo on a dot
- Explore the possibility of booking a performance by emailing the [Polka Dot Downtown Event Manager](#)
- Experience performances virtually on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- [Donate](#) to the Artist Fund to support additional performances

Since its inception, Polka Dot Downtown has been supported by businesses, non-profits, and contributions from private citizens. Sponsors include Melvin Mark Companies, 200 Market Building, Unico Properties, Lincoln Property Company, Prosper Portland, Downtown Portland, Halprin Landscape Conservancy, Portland Mall Management, Hoffman Construction Co., SmartPark, Downtown Development Group, Edlen & Co. Nike, Nordstrom, Packouz Jewelers, Truebeck Construction, Turner Construction Co., Killian Pacific, Oregon Community Foundation, The Reserve Vineyards and Golf Club, Gallatin Public Affairs, KGW, Alpha Media, and The Oregonian.

About Bill Will Studio

[Bill Will](#) is an acclaimed Oregon artist who has been creating public projects, museum installations, and studio work for the last 46 years. Will is adept at putting his finger on the irony of the ordinary. Even though his work often focuses on a political or social issue of our time, he is gifted in his ability to stand in the middle rather than expressing his position. This approach, not often found in contemporary art, invites participants of all shapes and beliefs to engage in his work. At the root of Will's work is always the pursuit of respectful humanity.

In June 2011, he presented "[You Are Here](#)", using 20,000 potted plants in The Square, as part of The Festival of Flowers. People from across the globe interacted by finding their country and conversing with strangers.

About Pioneer Courthouse Square, Inc.

Pioneer Courthouse Square, Inc. is a non-profit organization whose mission is to manage Downtown's central public gathering space, known adoringly as Portland's Living Room, to create a vibrant and healthy downtown environment. Typically hosting more than 300 programmed events each year, through a diverse range of public and private partnerships, Pioneer Courthouse Square, Inc. operates within a budget of \$2.2M composed of cash and in-kind donations.

Pioneer Courthouse Square, opened on April 6th, 1984 as a communal gathering place for a then-struggling downtown Portland. It has grown into a central hub for community, commerce, and culture and has been frequently lauded by groups like the Project for Public Spaces and the American Planning Association as one of the premier public spaces in the world.

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