

MUSIC

# Proud to play

The dedicated musicians of Rose City Gay Freedom Band toot their own horns for many good causes

BY LISA BRADSHAW



At Portland's 1990 pride festival, 10 musicians sat on metal folding chairs under a tree in the North Park Blocks and played for passers-by.

That was the first performance of the Rose City Gay Freedom Band, according to member Brenda Dworschak. She shows me pictures from a well-kept scrapbook that records the band's performances and growth. To my surprise, I note that the leader of that first event is conducting with one hand and playing the tuba with the other!

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the nonprofit RCGFB boasts a long list of achievements and a solid future. It's beefed up to about 35 members and it holds two major performances a year, in addition to playing at benefits and collaborating with other groups.

Most notably, the main concert band has given birth to several musical offspring.

Rose City Swing, a popular 17-piece big band, started in 1993—before the Lindy Hop's resurrection became a full-fledged trend—and now produces two dance parties a year.

There's a Dixieland band, the Dixie Rose, and a brass quintet, the Brass Rose, both of which are "on call," forming and playing when requested.

Then there's the Flag Corps—which performs, Dworschak says, "off and on,"—and the occasional woodwind ensemble. All these offshoots also play benefits and private engagements.

Because the band is a tax-exempt organization, none of the players are paid; they simply love to play music. Proceeds from all the shows go toward the management of the band or are donated to other queer organizations.

Todd Johnson, performance committee chairman, emphasizes the band's role in raising money for the community: "We are always looking to do more in the realm of community outreach," he explains. "If community organizations need our help, they're welcome to contact us."

The group's mission statement reflects its desire to be a charitable organization as well as an artistic outlet, and also to provide "positive role-modeling" and "community representation."

Dworschak, who has been playing trumpet with the band since its beginning, describes music as RCGFB's "number one thing" but also emphasizes the social opportunities the band offers.

"When I joined the band, I didn't have diversified gay friends. I hardly had any gay male friends," she says. "Now I have all kinds.... That's one of the neat things about the group;

we're a mixture—fifty-fifty male and female—and we come together because of music."

The band's ultimate goal, explains general manager Loren Dixon, is to raise enough money through grants and major sponsorships to offer free concerts. Currently, the price of admission to a concert is \$8 to \$10, and to the swing dances about \$12.

The performances themselves, although not free yet, certainly are musically accessible. I ask, jokingly, if they play mostly show tunes. Of course they play some, I'm told, but also classical pieces, marches, contemporary, folk, rock, ethnic, swing, pop and blues.

The swing dances offer members of Rose City Swing a chance to concentrate on the big-band tunes of the '40s and also to incorporate more modern swing music. The atmosphere is a lively dance party, notes sax man Johnson.

"The dancing is really open," he remarks. "It's not like you have to bring your own dance partner. Everybody's dancing with everybody."

Dworschak, also a member of the swing band, adds that these dances successfully fulfill part of the band's mission to integrate communities in a positive way.

"You see heterosexual and gay couples all dancing together on the dance floor, all having a great time," she says. "That's the part about bridging the gap and presenting this positive image and getting us all together."

Dixon concurs, observing that the dances also allow gay couples a venue to dance together "without being labeled or without people looking at them.... They can be themselves."

Having long since stored away the metal chairs of its first performance, the RCGFB turns into a marching band for the gay pride parade, this year on June 18.

Dworschak says the band members love the parade: "We're waiting and waiting and waiting to go, and pretty soon it gets to that.... Right there, on cue, drums start playing, music starts going, and people start screaming and hollering. I'm in the middle of the band going, 'This is pride.'"

■ The ROSE CITY GAY FREEDOM BAND is always looking for new members and is accepting applications for a new conductor. Call the group at (503) 790-2170, visit [www.rainbeaux.net/rcgfb](http://www.rainbeaux.net/rcgfb), or stop by the band's booth at the Portland pride festival June 17 and 18.

LISA BRADSHAW is a free-lance writer who can't play any instruments but highly respects people who can.

Pan Asian Cuisine

Join Us On Our Patio

WE DELIVER 288-3960  
To zip codes 97212 & 97232



Reservations Recommended

Lunch M-F  
Dinner every night

1411 NE Broadway

**Listen Up Sugar!**  
 Chez What?  
 is serving Cocktails!  
 (Starting Easter Weekend)  
 Specials day and night.  
 Tues. is Basket Madness!  
 Thurs. is vegan night.  
 Always choice of meaty or vegan.

**Chez What?**  
 Heavin' Helpings of Hearty Americana  
 2203 NE Alberta, Portland 281-1717  
 Hours: Sun. 9-3 Mon. 8-3 Tues.-Sat. 8-10ish (expanding soon)

*all you ever wanted*  
**BANANA'S**  
*Sometimes a Banana is just a Banana*

1214 NORTHWEST 21ST 274-2559

**William's on 12<sup>th</sup>**  
 "One of the top 20 restaurants in Portland." — Oregonian  
 — open 7 days — (503) 963-9226  
 Sun to Thurs 5-9pm • Fri and Sat 5-10pm 207 SE 12th, Portland, OR 97214

**LA CATALANA**  
 Catalan Restaurant & Tapas Bar  
 2821 SE Stark St.  
 Portland, Ore.  
 232-0948  
 Tues-Thur 5:30-10 pm  
 Fri-Sat 5:30-10:30 pm  
 Sunday 5:30-9 pm  
 Now come in and enjoy our limited bar

**eating out**  
 LET SOMEONE ELSE COOK TONIGHT

**the ROXY**  
 PORTLAND, OREGON  
 "In the heart of the Glamour District"  
 1121 SW Stark Street. Phone: 223-9160. Open 24 Hours.

Stop by the just out booth at Portland gay pride and pick up your free copy of the **2000 just out pocketbook**