

Music is Art Festival turns 12 in style

More than 100 bands, artists, dancers, DJs and random entertainers share their talents in the annual Music is Art

By [Jeff Miers](#) / *News Pop Music Critic* on September 10, 2014

I remember the first Music is Art Festival in 2002 like it was yesterday.

Goo Goo Dolls bassist and MiA founder Robby Takac hosted the event in the parking lot and surrounding environs of the building that, at that time, housed his Good Charamel Records and recording studio on Franklin Street. It ran concurrently with the yearly Allentown Art Festival. It was an incredible experience – as a party, as a concert, as a bohemian celebration of culture and subculture, and as a celebration of all that those who spend their lives in the local arts community hold dear.

It felt like it was too good to be true. Turns out, it was. The Allentown Art Festival saw Takac's Music is Art as competition, and soon, MiA would hit the road in search of a permanent home. After several successful years on the grounds of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery – and one not so successful year at the Hamburg Fairgrounds – Takac finally found that home in Delaware Park behind the Albright-Knox.

When you attend Music is Art, it's hard to feel anything but overwhelmed by both the depth and breadth of artistic talent of various shapes, sizes and styles in our area, and the very fact that Takac and his MiA team have kept their homegrown festival alive in a sometimes hostile and always challenging environment.

This year's festival, which takes place between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. Saturday, will find more than 100 bands performing on eight stages, plus multiple DJ stages, projections and performance art throughout the grounds, dancers, live art, a kids village and food and drink galore. It all conspires to make the event our own town's take on Lollapalooza or Bonaroo.

“Part of what makes the festival so exciting every year is the fact that you get the feeling that, at any time, anything could happen,” said MiA Executive Director Tracy Shattuck. “I mean, yeah, you get that feeling out in the crowd, but really, very often, we don't know exactly what's going to happen ourselves. We really encourage people to come and participate, even if they don't have an ‘official’ slot in the program. Bring your acoustic guitar, walk around and sing some songs. We love it. The hula hoopers you see, the jugglers, many of the musicians – they just show up and start doing their thing. And that's something we feel really good about.”

For musicians and members of the arts community, MiA is more than just a great party – it's a chance to share their wares with a large group of folks who are quite likely to be interested in what they're doing. It's a great gig to play – or to dance, or paint or spin records, as the case may be.

“I played the very first MiA fest,” said area musician and songwriter Steve Roth. “I had a lot of fun doing it and thought it was well run. The Allentown Arts Festival controversy somewhat

overshadowed it. But it was great being a part of the Western New York music community and seeing all kinds of musicians come together and show we're a musically rich city."

Indeed, we are, and from the beginning, Takac and team have focused with laserlike intensity on celebrating this fact. They'll do the same this year, but there is an interesting first time experience in store for attendees, too. Japanese all-female power pop/punk trio Shonen Knife will headline the mainstage on Saturday evening, making it the first international act to participate in Music is Art. (Unless you count the time that John Rzeznik showed up for an impromptu Goo Goo Dolls mini-set.)

"We are super-psyched to have them on the main stage this year," said Takac, in reference to Shonen Knife, who is signed to his Good Charamel Records. "They have a long history with Buffalo, playing here, recording a DVD here and so on. It just makes perfect sense. And it's a cool milestone for the festival. The guys from Green Jelly will be there performing, too."

Last year's festival was another challenge in a decade-plus of challenges – it rained. Hard. From morning until evening. But guess what? People came anyway. Not in the numbers they would have had the sun been shining. But enough to send a clear message of support.

"That's the thing that blows me away every day," said Shattuck. "The festival – and Music is Art as a whole – survives because of the people who show up and support it. They know that it's more than just a festival – they understand that there is a community connection to what we do, from our musical instrument drives, to what we do in the schools, etc.

"And of course, Buffalo loves Robby, and they know how much Robby loves Buffalo, through his actions."

email: jmiers@buffnews.com