

**In the Community**  
**Fate and commitment**  
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I've survived my first summer back in Connecticut. It didn't take much, although long creative and cooling spells of isolation became the only answer to a heat induced, unproductive lethargy that hit me like a hot wet towel. I could almost smell shade before I saw it and if I did leave home it wasn't without a 40-ounce bottle of water, a sun umbrella, and my iPod — it's never too hot for cool tunes.

I had a chance to see and hear a wide selection of summer arts events here in New Haven and I was excited about what I heard, saw, and experienced, especially local gatherings and activities involving theater, biking, hip-hop, art, drumming, and music.

The East Rock Festival, which was completely free and open to the public, featured scavenger hunts, bike rides, and all kinds of fun information for cyclists and non-cyclists alike. Art in the Park in Chatham Square Park was a fun, creative, spontaneous, and highly expressive neighborhood gathering. Dixwell Children's Art Festival was a two-day event for New Haven youth that focused on the arts, wellness, health workshops, and career awareness. Elm Shakespeare Company hosted a kids' performance camp at Quinnipiac Terrace. Luv My City, an event sponsored by Channel 1 skate shop, was geared towards bringing out the "luv" from within the city and featured talented and community minded hip-hop artists and many performances with a fun, socially positive vibe. New Haven's own Afro-Semitic Experience presented Unity in the Community, a public percussion/music workshop and concert at Neighborhood Music School, an event that was underwritten by the Louis Armstrong Foundation.

The commitment of these groups to put on these events represents a larger picture of desire for involvement, community, and healing throughout New Haven. Against dire national forecasts of declining participation at traditional venues, community groups and committed individuals have always challenged the fate of the traditional arts scene. This provides many ways for established, arts-related nonprofits (with an established operating budget and who's-who board) to re-examine how they support themselves.

Juxtapose this type of nonprofit model with a community based neighborhood group, or a nonprofit working with a small budget — or no budget at all — and you have the textbook scenario of work effectively being done at the community level. For little to no money down, these entities are directly affecting the lives of their members, neighbors, and participants. But this same community is often described by some nonprofits as being "difficult to reach."

There are also organizations that make the most of what they have and others that don't appreciate what they have.

As an example, there is a local nonprofit theater company (which will remain nameless) here in New Haven that makes the most of what it has, and there's a local nonprofit orchestra (which will also remain nameless) that does not.

The theater company offers outstanding productions on a nearly nonexistent budget and demonstrates a tireless desire to bring theater to as diverse an audience as possible. As a result, the theater company's audience is large and loyal.

The orchestra has modest budget, with which it contracts talented musicians to perform around six concerts a year. The orchestra also enjoys a loyal audience.

The difference between these two organizations is the investments they make in themselves.

While the theater company relies on a small, capable staff to accomplish its mission — recognizing the value of having a few creative people helping to navigate the waters — the orchestra sails along with no one at the wheel and no reliable lookout.

This stubborn approach is the mindset of the lemming.