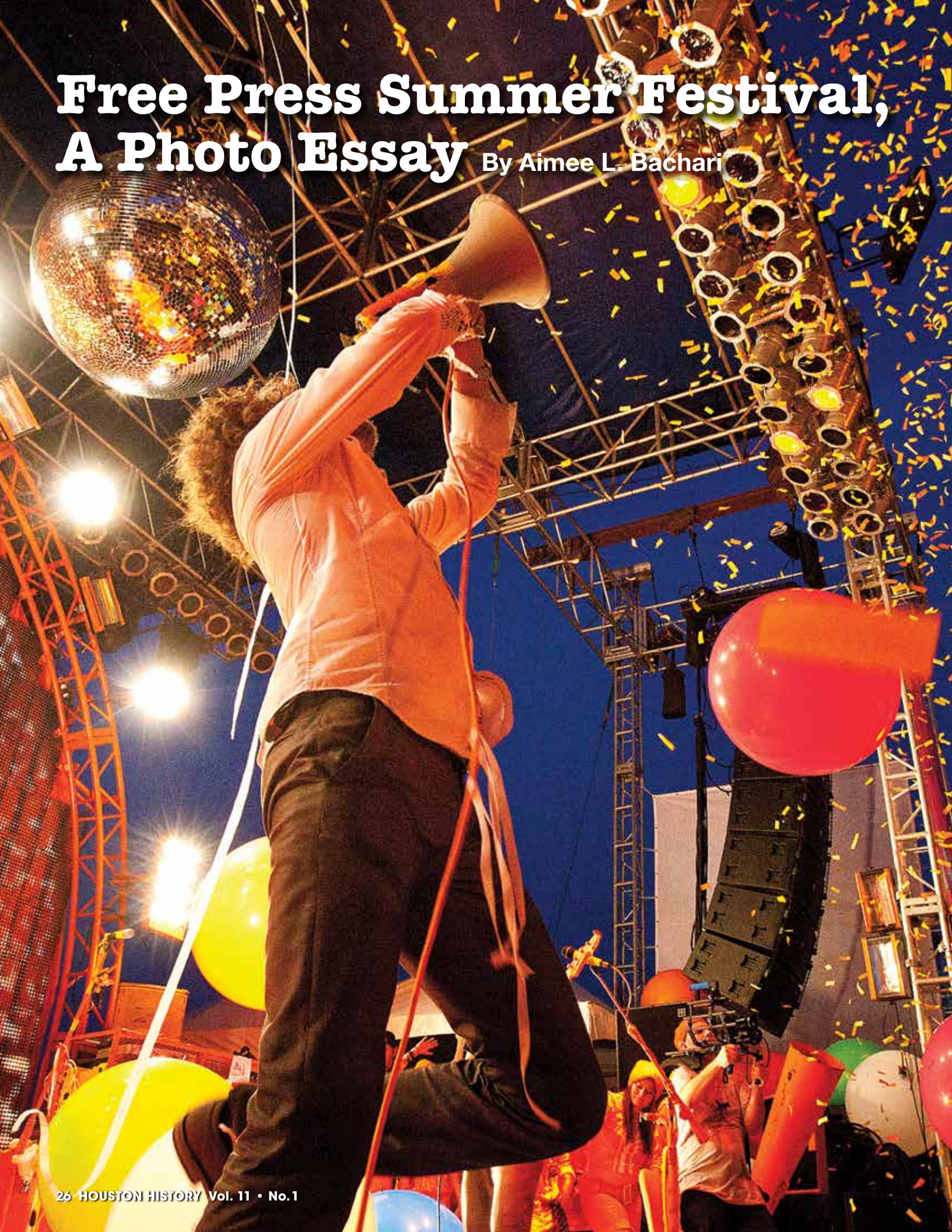


Free Press Summer Festival, A Photo Essay

By Aimee L. Bachari





"It [Free Press Houston] was something I'd talked about for a long time but once I lost my job and had no source of income, which was a good motivator, it was time to put up or shut up and there was a lack of any local, independent, alternative newspapers in Houston," Omar Afra recalls. He first funded Free Press Houston from a single tax return before finally selling advertising to cover costs. "My friends say I'm doing now what I did in high school: throwing parties, making flyers, and disseminating information. I always thought it would grow into a traditional newspaper model but I eventually realized it's value was less in being a canvas style, big bucks, publication and more about the specific demographic and message that we cater to."

Image courtesy of Free Press Houston.

Omar Afra, one of the co-founders of Free Press Summer Festival, was born in Beirut, Lebanon, but has lived in Houston since the age of two. He attended Askew Elementary, Paul Revere Middle School, and Lee High School. Afra went on to a slew of community colleges, the University of Arizona, and the University of Houston to study journalism and political science. In 2003, he started *Free Press Houston*. Free Press TV started in 2009. Afra explains that, "the motive was originally to do the silly stuff we hatched in our heads. There was no financial or journalistic motive. Since then, we've managed to include serious content while continuing to interweave the silly stuff but it's still a work in progress." Free Press Summer Festival (FPSF), produced by *Free Press Houston* and Pegstar.net, began in 2009 and brings both local and national artists to Houston's Eleanor Tinsley Park each year. The following information came from a conversation between Omar Afra and Aimee L. Bachari on September 18, 2013.

For more information on *Free Press Houston*, visit www.freepresshouston.com. To watch Free Press TV, go to www.youtube.com/user/FPTVnews. To learn more about next year's FPSF, visit www.fpsf.com.

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Wayne Coyne of The Flaming Lips performs at FPSF on Sunday, June 6, 2010. FPSF provides more than just a space for music. Eleanor Tinsley Park and Allen Parkway become artists' canvases, offering a chance for Houston and area artists to feature works before tens of thousands festival attendees.

All photos by and courtesy of Todd Spoth Photography, www.toddspoth.com, unless otherwise noted.



Country music singer and song-writer Willie Nelson, a native Texan, performed at FPSF in 2012. Other major performers from that year were Snoop Dogg, Primus, and Erykah Badu.



Rapper and native Houstonian, Paul Wall takes the stage in 2013. The banner behind him reads: "It does not matter who you are," the FPSF slogan that began in 2012. Also entertaining the crowds in 2013 was A Sea Es, a local Houston band. Other Houston artists and bands that have graced the stage throughout the history of FPSF are: Robert Ellis, Grandfather Child, Buxton, Side Show Tramps, The Ton Tons, and Los Skarnales (see Natalie Garza's article on Mexican American music in this issue).



Free Press Summer Festival has continuously grown since its inception in 2009 when it outgrew the smaller Westheimer Street Festival. The first FPSF attracted 18,000 people to Houston's Eleanor Tinsley Park, and in 2013, over 80,000 people attended the festival. Major Lazer performs wearing a Clyde Drexler jersey at the 2012 FPSF. Drexler attended the University of Houston and was a member of Phi Slama Jama from 1980-1983. He came back to Houston to play for the Houston Rockets from 1995-1998.



Omar Afra describes the move from the smaller Westheimer Street Festival that lasted five years to the current Free Press Summer Festival: "We felt, after the Westheimer Street Festival came to a demise the year prior, that we wanted to continue to carry the torch. We wanted to keep music and art in Montrose alive, the locals wanted us to do it, and we were happy to oblige. It was a great precursor to FPSF." This photo shows the main stage on June 6, 2010, during The Flaming Lips performance.

