



CONTACT: Nicolas DeGrazia
847.651.0370 (call or text)
Music@BitterJester.com

LINKS: www.bitterjestermusic.org
[Instagram](#) – [FaceBook](#)

MEDIA ALERT – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 28, 2023

~ jpgs / audio / video available ~

17th Annual Bitter Jester Music Festival Seeks Midwest Bands & Solo Artists

Applications now open: \$3,500 in Prize Money plus a \$15,000 Media Package will be awarded – One Finalist will open for a National Headliner at Ravinia in 2024

HIGHLAND PARK, IL – Now in its 17th season of live shows, the [Bitter Jester Music Festival](#) (BJMF) is seeking bands and solo musicians [to apply online](#) for a chance to win incredible prizes and receive expert-level growth-oriented feedback from industry professionals. A ‘battle of the bands’ style event, BJMF has a reputation for showcasing incredibly talented emerging musicians from across the Midwest at its free weekly concert series in Downtown Highland Park each June.

The 2023 Preliminary Concerts will be June 2, 3, 9, and 10, beginning at 6:00 pm, with pizza, craft beer, and wine available to patrons at Port Clinton Square, 600 Central Ave, Highland Park, IL 60035.

Applications are due by 11:59 pm CST on April 30. To apply, at least half the band members must be 21 or younger but all musical styles and genres are accepted and solo performers are welcome.

Prize money, generously donated by First Bank of Highland Park for the fourth year in a row, has been doubled to \$2,000 for the Grand Champions (Runners-Up now receive \$1,000; Honorable Mention win \$500). “But it’s more than just doubling the cash prize,” says Nicolas DeGrazia, BJMF’s Founder and Producer. “We have so many more exciting announcements in store for this season.”

After the unfortunate cancellation of its 2022 Grand Finale due to the mass shooting on the 4th of July in Highland Park, BJMF returned to Billy Corgan and Chloé Mendel’s Madame Zuzu’s on September 4, 2022. The rebooted Finale was turned into a successful benefit concert for the HP Business Recovery Fund. Recorded audio is being turned into a special commemorative album, available this summer.

“Thanks to a generous [collaboration with Val’s halla Records in Oak Park](#), not only have we created our first ever ‘Live at Bitter Jester’ album,” DeGrazia said, “but this double record is really something special. It’s an historical document. It’s a celebration of the resiliency of my home town of Highland Park as we began recovering from that awful day, but it’s also a showcase of the super talented musicians who returned to H.P. two months later to do something good and uplifting for everyone.”

DeGrazia said he is proud of how the album turned out and plans to make “Live at Bitter Jester” an annual release, with the second volume to be recorded at the 2023 Grand Finale on June 25. All future BJMF Finalists will appear on both vinyl and digital albums in the years to come.

Also new in 2023, BJMF is will be [giving away a \\$15,000 Media Package](#) that includes a studio music video, a professional photo shoot, and an on-camera interview with Radio Hall of Fame nominee Kevin Matthews. The partnership is a collaboration with Matthew’s Michigan-based “Elevator a GoGo,” a company he formed with award winning photographer Robert Neumann.

Continuing this summer is a partnership that began in 2021 with Ravinia Festival. “The musicality exhibited by the high caliber musicians under the care of the Bitter Jester music program is undeniable,” [says Erik Soderstrom](#), Ravinia’s Senior Artistic Producer. “Because of this, top performers coming out of the Bitter Jester Music Festival will have a home at Ravinia, enjoying an annual Carousel Stage opening spot for some of the nation's biggest acts.”

First opened in 1904, Ravinia is the oldest outdoor music festival in the United States. BJMF’s 2021 Grand Champions opened for the multi-platinum winning Steve Miller Band and the 2022 Runners-Up, Summer League, will be opening for the four-time Grammy-nominated [Charlie Puth on June 24](#).

The 2023 Bitter Jester Grand Finale Concert – featuring the best acts of the summer – takes place on Sunday, June 25, at The Lot, Highland Park’s new “al fresco dining and entertainment venue” at the corner of Central Ave. & St Johns Ave. Music begins at noon and the event is in conjunction with The Taste of Highland Park weekend (June 23 & 24), with food and drink vendors eager to stay for a third day. All Bitter Jester concerts are FREE and there is no cost for parking. The festival also has a special group rate at Courtyard by Marriott in Highland Park for performers and their fans.

But the competition is only a small part of the festival. While audiences sit back and enjoy a wide variety of musical acts and judges pick winners, the festival’s producers focus on the performers. Many BJMF alumni have catapulted to larger, career-altering gigs including playing Lollapalooza and Riot Fest, appearing on various seasons of American Idol, and performing on PostmodernJukebox, Late Night with Seth Meyers, and Saturday Night Live as musical guests.

To help aid such launches, BJMF provides its musicians with unparalleled amounts of media and educational materials. These include detailed constructive written feedback from qualified judges, numerical scores and charts, audio recordings (including multitracks), free concert photo shoots, real-time recorded verbal feedback, podcast interviews, ongoing social media exposure, networking opportunities, radio and television appearances, and more.

[A “Best Of” Showcase takes place on Labor Day at Navy Pier’s beer garden](#) and a continuing partnership with Harry Caray’s Tavern (also on Navy Pier) provides past and present Bitter Jester musicians aged 21+ with paid performance opportunities from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

DeGrazia is a seven-time Emmy-winning producer/director who gives up his free time to oversee this unique festival. “No other competition puts this much time and attention to detail into making sure all its musicians – regardless of winning – are taken care of. Bitter Jester performers have fun, grow as artists, learn a lot, and leave with a ton more information and industry connections than they had coming in,” he says. “This is made possible thanks to the outstanding support we get from the City of Highland Park.”

Virtually everyone at BJMF donates their time. “I volunteer for this incredible organization because my life was so profoundly shaped by it when I was a teenager,” says BJMF Director of Education Michael Tseitlin, himself a five-time competitor and now Director of Guitar at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, IL. “I wouldn’t have gone into music education if it weren’t for Bitter Jester.”

The nonprofit festival is funded, in part, by donations, grants from the Highland Park Community Foundation and the Illinois Arts Council Agency, and various sponsorships, including [the City of Highland Park](#) and [Elmore Pedals](#), who will be doing a limited edition BJMF branded pedal this year.

For more information or to submit an application, visit www.BitterJesterMusic.org.