

The day the music stopped, at least for a minute, to focus on arts funding

Musicians at all Musikfest venues took a break to point out state budget cut danger.

By Michael Duck

OF THE MORNING CALL

The band 3D Ritmo de Vida and its infectious salsa rhythms had packed a crowd into Musikfest's Plaza Tropical on Friday evening. As a few couples got up to dance, the rest of the audience couldn't resist bopping along in their chairs to the syncopated beats coming from band leader Michael Tate's drums.

And then, at 6:33 p.m., the music stopped. Musikfest volunteer Dana Baker of Springfield Township stepped up to the microphone, and things got political.

"Your state Legislature in Pennsylvania is about to cut \$14 million in arts funding," Baker told the crowd. A small percentage of that money goes to the 10-day Bethlehem music festival, which might have to close a few of its stages if the funding is cut, Baker said, drawing scattered boos.

Baker's announcement coincided with similar messages at all of Musikfest's venues around 6:30 p.m., all directing festival-goers to check out the Web site citizensfortheartsinpa.org and get involved. Organizers hoped the festival-wide announcements would show Musikfest's thousands of daily attendees what could be at stake in the state Legislature's ongoing budget battle.

Judging by the reactions at Plaza Tropical, they were at least partly successful.

"It was a little depressing after such fun music, but it's important," said Emily Kleimo of Lancaster, a Drexel University student involved in singing, dance and drama. She thought the announcement was a

good way to let people know what could happen to arts funding. The only problem was that she hadn't known she'd need to bring a pen and paper to the concert to jot down a 26-character Internet address.

"I want to know what the Web site is," she noted glumly, several minutes after Baker had announced it.

Though legislators and Gov. Ed Rendell haven't reached any agreement on a final state budget, a place-holder budget approved this week in Harrisburg does cut — at least for now — \$14 million in grants for the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

If the cuts stick, they'd affect not only Musikfest stages but also local arts education programs, said festival spokeswoman Kim Plyler.

As of Friday night, it was far too soon to know how well that message reached attendees, Plyler said. Still, "we're hoping that people will log on to citizensfortheartsinpa.org to voice their opinions and their support."

Back at Plaza Tropical, Jane Lashner of Abington said she thought the Musikfest-wide announcement was a great idea. "They should do everything they can to keep the arts from being cut," she said, though she added that having attendees sign a petition would have been a more immediate way to get people involved.

Failing that, she said she'd love to check out the Web site Baker had mentioned on-stage — if she could just remember it.

"Citizens for the arts? Dot com?" she asked. "Was that it?"

