

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



Flam Chen, Tucson's favorite pyrotechnic artists, send up a mighty flare into the desert sky at Day of the Dead in this Nov. 5, 2007 file photo. Flam Chen will be performing at Ms. Spyder's Combustible Tea Party this Saturday.

No sugar at this 'tea party'

Annual benefit gives offbeat local artists chance to shine

By: Laura Hawkins

Posted: 4/24/08

What do you get when you combine fire, clowns, good music and children's literature? No, not some kind of terrifying ritual book-burning. It's "Ms. Spyder's Combustible Tea Party," the sixth annual benefit for Radio Electra FM, showcasing some of Tucson's most eccentric artists and musicians.

Think of it as a small sliver of Burning Man - nowhere near the magnitude of a secluded, 48,000-artist civilization, but brimming with the same ambitious, innovative individuals that help define it.

Radio Electra is a community-based radio station in Black Rock City, the expanse of desert 100 miles north of Reno, Nev., on which the 10-day Burning Man festival takes place. During those 10 days, the station provides a medium for disc jockeys, a space for fellow artists and public service announcements for everyone from festival-goers to park rangers and law enforcement.

Also during that time, the station's equipment becomes infiltrated with dust and sometimes breaks down in the face of desert wrath. This benefit was conceived six years ago as a way to raise money for operating costs while still "giving people something for their money," said Gary Taylor, Radio Electra founder and Arizona regional representative for the Burning Man Project.

About 400 people are expected to attend, Taylor said.

Each year Taylor hosts a different non-profit group at the benefit; this year he chose the San Francisco-based Burners Without Borders, a relief effort that

formed at Burning Man 2005 as Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. The original 300 volunteers helped clean up in New Orleans and several communities in Mississippi, donating more than \$1 million in construction, food and other essential materials, according to the Burners Without Borders Web site.

There have been about 200 volunteers - about half Burning Man participants and half travelers - reconstructing schools and homes in Peru since December, when an 8.0 magnitude earthquake left more than 80,000 people homeless.

A percentage of funds collected at the benefit will be given to Burners Without Borders, and will go toward the effort in Peru, said Burners Without Borders founder and director Carmen Mauk.

And between all the performances by Tucson's pyrotechnic theater group Flam Chen, surf-goth band The Mission Creeps, Clown Band and Metrognome - not to mention a full staff of Radio Electra DJs and spontaneous performance art - the funds will be well-earned.

Three new performers will be featured in Flam Chen's "Ms. Spyder's Combustible Tea Party," an interactive, flame-filled show based loosely on the children's book "Miss Spider's Tea Party."

Attendees get a price reduction for dressing up in circus or vaudeville attire. "Anything goes," said Flam Chen founder Paul Weir. "It's all up to your imagination."

For anyone curious about the Burning Man Project and what its participants do, the Radio Electra Benefit is an opportune time to meet a few bona fide "burners" and find out.

The fun starts Saturday at 8 p.m. at Nimbus Brewery, 3850 E. 44th St., No. 138. Entrance is \$12 in street clothes and \$10 in costume.

© Copyright 2008 Arizona Daily Wildcat