

Boca's fabulous and fierce heart

If Boca Raton has a downtown, it is centered on plaza-ricious Mizner Park.

The open-air entertainment/dining/shopping/office/condo space has a pseudo town square ambition to it ... and yet there is gloss in the air, which settles on everything like the sparkly shimmer from glitter makeup.

Mizner Park is Boca's heart, its fabulous and fierce heart.

As for performances, the centerpiece is the Mizner Park Amphitheater, a stately courtyard wrapped in a colonade with a stage on one end and a clock tower on the other. Here the city of Boca Raton oversees community productions (Boca Ballet Theatre), city events (Festival of the Arts) and commercial concerts (last season saw neo-soulster John Legend and pop rockers fun).

Nestled beside is the Boca Museum of Art with its deep and diverse collections (on the other side of Federal Highway is the how-long-has-that-been-there-? Boca History Museum).

You can also find theater at the Mizner Park Cultural Arts Center (formerly the International Museum of Cartoon Art), where troupes such as Outre Theatre Company, Parade Productions and the Boca Raton Theatre Guild have found a home.

On Friday and Saturday nights, free parking can be a search-circle-pounce kind of scenario, even with four garages. And don't even think about slipping into one of the spaces in the adjacent Mizner Plaza, where the security guard eyes you suspiciously to see if you're crossing the street. So I often park a few blocks away to the south at Royal Palm Place, Mizner Park's older sibling. Things are quieter there and no one yells at you for parking ... as long as you grab a little nosh or guzzle down a cocktail. I don't know about you, but that is hardly a problem for me.

— Rod Stafford Hagwood



Entertainers pump energy into the week-end evenings at the popular Boca venue.



PHOTOS BY ROBERT DUYOS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Mizner Park's Dubliner, above, is a fine choice for food and drink before heading to the amphitheater, below, for a show.



A good crowd gathers on an August evening for a free big band concert at Mizner Park Amphitheater.



Mizner Park Amphitheater

590 Plaza Real, Boca Raton;
561-393-7700;

MyBoca.us/Pages/MiznerAmphi

Parking: Four free garages, and off-site parking at City Hall and the Downtown Library. Preferred, paid parking available in adjacent lot on concert nights. On-street, metered parking also available, as well as valet.

Size: Accommodates 4,200