

Carol Kelly

Your cultural fantasy

Seattle's artistic community

Twyla Tharp choreographs two new pieces of work, one of which is set to the music of Johannes Brahms, and the other to the music of Vladimer Martynov. You see the premier of these new works performed by the dancers for whom the pieces were created.

Wagner's Ring of the Nibelungen (his Ring Cycle) is performed in its entirety over the period of a month. You see each of the operas, performed by the world's finest operatic artists in a magical new opera house. Before the performance, you run barefoot through a continually flowing reflecting pool.

An initiative is launched by one of the country's preeminent modern dance choreographers, Donald Byrd. It is called "Promoting Awareness and Mutual Understanding," and it brings together the creative talents of Israeli and American artists to examine the seemingly endless Middle East Crisis. You have a seat in the front row.

Charlayne Woodard, award-winning contemporary playwright and actress, debuts a new work, which is directed by the Tony Award-winning director, Daniel Sullivan. You are among those at the premiere performance. Afterward, the playwright and director sit on stage to answer your questions about the play.

Toshiko Akiyoshi, who was the first woman jazz artist to win DownBeat Magazine's award for "Best Arranger and Composer," performs with the swinging sounds of a top big band jazz orchestra. That is you, sitting in the middle of the house, tapping your toe, unable to resist the rhythm coming out of Clarence Acox's drums.

In an effort to process the results of a tumultuous election year, you seek solace and direction from the arts. A collection of paintings entitled "Life Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" includes works by Thomas Eakins and Winslow Homer. You stand a long while looking at John Trumbull's work. It is called "The Declaration of Independence." The precise brush strokes outline the faces of the remarkable men whose ideas continue to inspire.

You are walking on a windswept hill, before you is the sparkling surface of a vast waterway. Behind you is the outline of a modern city; the shining facades of the buildings refract the sunlight. The air is laden with the salty scent of the Pacific Ocean. You are walking through a sculpture garden where the work of some of the most influential contemporary artists is featured. The piece you are standing under resembles a powerful bird—an eagle. It looks as though it is prepared to take flight, launching off into the expanse of sky above the azure water.

"Enough," you tell yourself, commanding your over active imagination to stop envisioning such diversity of cultural events. And then, reverie burst, you realize that there is no need to fantasize this roster of events. They will all take place—next year—in Seattle.

There are only a handful of cities in the United States that can offer visitors exposure



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to all the major artistic disciplines. Seattle is one of those cities. Seattle's artistic community includes cultural institutions at all stages of their development: from the cutting-edge, newly formed dance company to the Pacific Northwest Ballet; and from the new cool jazz quartet who are laying down their first tracks to an impressive list of major artists (Quincy Jones to name one) who claim Seattle as their home town. Each of these institutions contributes to making Seattle one of the major cultural destinations in the country. So let your cultural fantasies run wild; it is less about finding out what opportunities are here and more about deciding which of these opportunities to explore.

Theater

Seattle's theater scene feeds an active audience member's lifelong passion for theatre in a literal sense. The Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT) produces plays for younger audiences in two state-of-the-art performance spaces. With high production values and the country's most innovative directors, actors, and playwrights, SCT engages an audience of 250,000 children, parents, and teachers annually. The

SCT Drama School offers a full spectrum of theater classes to kids at every age level. The school's courses register 3,300 children each year in programs that foster creativity, leadership, and the collaborative skills that can only be learned through work within an ensemble. Where else can one find such childhood classics as *Goodnight Moon* set to music, the toys coming to life, the little bunny navigating his way through the wonderland of his room? *Goodnight Moon* is one of the featured, main stage shows at SCT this season.

The Tony Award-winning Seattle Repertory Theatre One is one of the largest and most highly regarded regional theatres in the United States. "The Rep," as the locals call it, produces everything from classical drama to contemporary comedy in either the large theater—The Bagley Wright—or their smaller, "jewel box" theater—The Leo K. They feature the work of the finest playwrights working today, having premiered all the plays in August Wilson's cannon and works by Wendy Wasserstein, Sarah Ruhl, and others. The roster of actors who have appeared at The Rep include such acclaimed talents as Meryl Streep and Lawrence Fishburne. The Rep is

Seattle culture on the Web

- Seattle Children's Theatre, www.sct.org
- Seattle Repertory Theatre, www.seattlerep.org
- Intiman Theater, www.intiman.org
- A Contemporary theatre, www.acttheatre.org
- Paramount Theater, www.theparamount.com
- Fifth Avenue Theater, www.5thavenue.org
- Taproot theater, www.taproottheatre.org
- Seattle Public Theater, www.seattlepublictheater.org
- Theater Schmeater, www.schmeater.org
- Seattle Shakespeare Theater, www.seattleshakespeare.org
- Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra, www.srjo.org
- Tula's, www.tulas.com/
- The New Orleans, www.neworleanscreolerestaurant.com
- Seattle Youth Symphony, www.syso.org
- Seattle Opera, www.seattleopera.org
- Seattle Art Museum, www.seattleartmuseum.org
- Seattle Asian Art Museum, www.seattleartmuseum.org/visit/visitSAAM.asp
- Olympic Sculpture Park, www.seattleartmuseum.org/visit/OSP/default.asp
- Wing Luke Asian Museum, www.wingluke.org
- First Thursdays Art Walk, firstthursday-seattle.com
- On the Boards, ontheboards.org
- Spectrum Dance Theater, www.spectrumdance.org
- Pacific Northwest Ballet, www.pnb.org

also known for the high quality of more local talent, as the region is home to a vibrant west coast theater community. The present season at The Rep includes a long-awaited production of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*, featuring Bill Irwin and, in March, The Seattle Repertory Theatre will produce "The Seafarer" by Conor McPherson. This startling, hilarious, and ominous Irish play is a recent Broadway hit and was called the "best new play of the year" by *The Wall Street Journal*.

Winning Tony Awards seems to run in town. The Intiman Theatre, a neighbor of The Rep on the Seattle Center campus, has been so honored. The theater community isn't confined to just Seattle Center. Major downtown theaters include A Contemporary Theatre, the Fifth Avenue, and the Paramount. Both Fifth Avenue and the Paramount regularly feature Broadway shows and top line performing artists. Everyone from Jerry Seinfeld to Carlos Santana have performed at the Paramount. In March, the elaborate sets and compelling music of *The Lion King* will be featured.

Smaller theater venues provide more intimate settings, but the quality of the theater is still extraordinary. These smaller venues include The Taproot Theatre in Seattle's Greenwood neighborhood and The Seattle Public Theatre right on the banks of Green Lake. If one prefers an all Shakespeare diet, the Seattle Shakespeare Theatre offers the Bard's work in productions that are fresh, brilliantly conceived, and expertly performed. The company will produce "The Merchant of Venice" in March, featuring two of Seattle's most gifted performers, Todd Jefferson Moore and R. Hamilton Wright. This will be the hot ticket in town.

Music

Seattle's music scene is perhaps best illustrated by the depth of talent in two very different

genres. The Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra (SRJO), directed by Clarence Acox and Michael Brockman, features a big band sound and the region's most highly sought after jazz musicians. SRJO performs regularly at the Nordstrom Recital Hall in the Benaroya Hall complex. The other wing of the building is home to The Seattle Symphony. Playing in a state-of-the-art, downtown venue that opened ten years ago, the symphony has achieved international recognition and is the most recorded symphony in the country. Among the works that are to be performed this season



Janice Baird in the title role of Richard Strauss' *Elektra*, Seattle Opera, fall 2008. © Patrice Nim, Toulouse

is the monumental *Mabler's 8th*, the "Symphony of a Thousand." In March, the symphony features the English violinist Tasmin Little on a program that includes the works of Edward Elgar and Dvorak's *Symphony Number Six*. Small jazz venues abound in Seattle. From Tula's in Belltown to The New Orleans near Pioneer Square, there is always an opportunity to swing it in the Emerald City. Seattle engages the community in the music scene from early on. The Seattle Youth

Symphony is the largest youth symphony in the United States, and two local high schools, Garfield and Roosevelt, regularly trade honors winning The Essentially Ellington competition in New York City. It is no fantasy. If you're into music—any kind of music, be it klezmer, new age, or even a "Sedentary Souza Marching Band"—you will be able to find the best of it in Seattle.

Opera

Even before you've heard the overture, your sights and senses will be awakened by attending the Seattle Opera. The company performs in Marion Oliver McCaw Hall, which opened in 2003. The building itself is a work of art and has received critical acclaim for both its interior and exterior spaces. McCaw Hall was

designed by LMN Architects, featuring the work of interior designer Deborah Sussman, artist Leni Schwendinger, and the landscape designers of Gustafson Guthrie Nichol Ltd. The space is commensurate with the intense theatricality inherent in this art form. Once seated, opera lovers are treated to world-class voices—think Jane Eaglen and Ben Heppner in *Tristan und Isolde*—performing new works of contemporary American opera and the complete repertoire of classic European operas, all under the direction of innovative directors and dramatically sensitive conductors. The company performs five operas each year and emphasizes their relationship to the work of Wagner by regularly performing the complete *Ring Cycle*. To encourage the future of opera, the company maintains a highly regarded Young Artists Program, as well as a vibrant opera education program that includes a year-long lecture series at Seattle University.

Visual art

As a Pacific Rim city, Seattle is a place of diverse cultural heritage. The confluence of Pan Asian, Asian, Native American, Scandinavian, and North American cultures is seen nowhere more evidently than in the three separate venues that make up the Seattle Art Museum (SAM). SAM Downtown has just completed an extensive expansion and renovation. The collection takes one, literally, inside the mysterious beauty of a 16th-century Italian room. Audio guides and computer screens bring patrons the voices of artists and curators who provide insight into the particular culture from which the work of the artist emanates. One can see works of Northwest Native American Art, an extensive collection of African masks, and the paintings of European, modern, and post-modern masters. Exciting special exhibitions, such as “Edward Hopper’s Women,” are also a part of what makes SAM a terrific museum. In March, SAM Downtown will feature the exhibit “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” The Seattle Asian Art Museum, located in Volunteer Park in an historic building overlooking downtown and the Puget Sound, offers viewers a vast col-

lection of Asian art, including textiles, paintings, sculpture, and more. SAM’s Olympic Sculpture Park turns what was once a nine-acre industrial site into an open-air museum, featuring the works of artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Alexander Calder, and Anthony Caro. The park unites Seattle’s waterfront, cityscape, and visitors to the park view cutting-edge sculpture as they make their way down a path that leads to the water’s edge. SAM joins local art galleries by staying open late and by providing free admission on “First Thursdays” every month.

Dance

If you want to see ground-breaking, cutting-edge dance, performance art, or theatrical movement, On the Boards is the place to go. Many internationally acclaimed artists have premiered breakthrough performances at On the Boards. Bill T. Jones, Spalding Gray, Sankai Juku, and The Wooster Group are among those whose work was nurtured in this nationally recognized performance venue.

Spectrum Dance Theatre, under the direction of Donald Byrd, brings the highest quality contemporary dance to a widely diverse audience. Spectrum’s Lecture Series I has been created to foster a dialogue between working artists and audiences. The Series is part of Spectrum’s new initiative: “Beyond Dance: Promoting Awareness and Mutual Understanding.”

Finally, Seattle’s Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB) is one of the United States’ most highly regarded ballet companies. PNB has delighted audiences all over the world. The company retains close ties with the Balanchine repertoire, and, under the direction of Peter Boal, PNB has expanded the scope of its repertory to include the choreography of the finest contemporary American artists, including Mark Morris and Twyla Tharp. Both Spectrum and PNB maintain schools that provide excellent training for the next generation of dancers. Anyone who wishes to experience dance from the other side of the stage can find a

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one baked, and one unbaked. This was done to guard against the two major natural threats of the time—fire and flood. In a fire, the unbaked copy would survive, and after a flood, the baked would remain. This, he speculated, perhaps compares favorably to our day, when we have created history's fastest growing, yet least persistent technology—the Web.

The last day featured a PhD forum sponsored by the American Society for Information Science and Technology, with graduate student presentations from Estonia, the United States, and Canada, along with smaller poster sessions from presenters from all over the world. Invited speaker Anna Maria Tammaro introduced quality models and some core values for digital librarianship and its teaching designed to reach across cultures, forming an international basis for the field.

And in a session designed to introduce one of the central topics for LIDA 2009, Natasa Milic-Frayling from Microsoft Research, UK, attempted to describe how the continued existence of libraries and librarians involves a willingness to redefine our roles and practices. She examined our urge to preserve, showing how humanity has always produced knowledge, ideas and data, and then attempted to preserve it. We now produce more information and media than ever, and she asked that, given the expense of digital preservation, we think about why

we want to preserve such a large percentage of it. Choosing cultural priorities and deciding on questions of relevance are volatile issues, and according to Milic-Frayling, may be aspects of the future of librarianship. She offered the example of a particular Leonardo da Vinci codex, one copy of which resides in the British Library, with the other owned by Microsoft. When Italy wants to reacquire this piece of its cultural heritage, who decides how that happens or which organization should relinquish their copy?

Questions of this sort related to aspects of both conference tracks filled the talks given at this effective and thought-provoking five-day gathering, and attempts at answers were generated in formal and informal discussion alike. One of the strengths of LIDA 2008 (and every other year, I would imagine) was the close proximity of all its participants, allowing these conversations to move from the meeting rooms to coffee to the lovely stone streets of Dubrovnik and the restaurants of Mjlet.

The 2009 version of LIDA, its tenth anniversary, will be held in Dubrovnik and Zadar, Croatia, and will feature two different themes: "Heritage and Digital Libraries: Digitization, Preservation and Access" and "Reflections: Changes Brought By and in Digital Libraries in the Last Decade." After this tenth conference, planned for May 25–30, 2009, it is intended for LIDA to become a biannual gathering. //

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drop-in class in the style of their choice at the wide variety of dance studios in town. How about dropping by Velocity Dance Studio on Seattle's Capital Hill for a hip-hop class? The teachers are smart, savvy, and rockin', and the drop-in format makes the environment welcoming and, should one's expertise require, forgiving.

Understanding the wealth of cultural opportunities that Seattle has to offer necessitates that one recognize the pattern that has been established by the community of artists and their audiences. Seattle respects the next generation of artists by fostering environments where new artists can get their work shown,

by supporting the training of future artists, and by maintaining an open mind toward authentic cultural diversity. And Seattle's artistic community actively seeks ways to engage their audiences beyond the performances by offering education, dialogue, and exposure to artists and their work.

So, it isn't just your imagination. No need to fantasize about the perfect season of cultural events. One needn't enter a realm of purple haze, dreaming about how all the artistic disciplines can work together to inspire, enlighten, and engage. It can all happen in Seattle. Oh, yes. Speaking of purple haze, did we mention that Jimi Hendrix comes from Seattle? //