


Fine Arts Preview

New seasons,
new missions,
movers and
shakers
and more!



Arts advocate,
creator and
educator Sheri
Williams Pannell

UNDERWRITTEN BY

Reinhart
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We also believe that the arts possess a unique ability to bring us together, break down barriers and foster understanding across cultures, which is why we so strongly support those working to ensure access to the arts for everyone in our communities.

UNDERWRITTEN BY

Reinhart
Boerner Van Deuren s.c. Attorneys at Law

Introduction

Is there anything more exhilarating than live performance — to be surrounded by fellow theater, dance or music lovers all taking in that performance as a shared experience and as a uniquely personal one, as well? Whether you are a longtime arts fan, or are just getting your feet wet in this region's world-class and widely varied arts scene, we're certain you are as delighted as we are that actors, dancers and musicians are now returning to local theaters, venues and stages with the coming of fall, allowing each of us the kind of transcendent experience that only live performance can deliver. In these pages, you will find not only the when and where, but also the *why* of art here in Milwaukee — meeting the individuals, organizations and companies that make those stages sing, and learning more about new insights and philosophies that represent an invigorating new era in local performance. We hope you enjoy.

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On the Cover

Sheri Williams Pannell is a prolific playwright and theater producer who cofounded the Milwaukee Black Theatre Festival, the Bronzeville Arts Ensemble and the Milwaukee Black Theatre Festival. She frequently collaborates with Milwaukee Repertory Theater, First Stage, Mothers Against Gun Violence and other arts and civic organizations throughout the Milwaukee region. Read more about Sheri on page 10. / Photo by Laura Dierbeck

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REDISCOVER A GEM

CLASSIC JEWELS

A Concert to Honor the
Memory of Don Taylor

2 p.m., Sun., Sept. 26, 2021

Oconomowoc Arts Center

641 E Forest Street, Oconomowoc

Join us for classical favorites as the orchestra performs Dvorak: Scherzo Capriccioso; Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1, Ilya Yakushev, soloist and Sibelius: Symphony No. 5.

FACETS OF BROADWAY With John McGivern

7 p.m., Thurs., Oct. 28, 2021

Oconomowoc Arts Center

This fun-filled, show-stopping concert will feature John McGivern as narrator of Benjamin Britten’s “The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra” along with selections from Hamilton, Titanic, Les Miserables, Miss Saigon, Phantom of the Opera and Camelot.

A SPARKLING HOLIDAY

2 p.m., Sun., Dec. 12, 2021

Shattuck Auditorium at Carroll University

Celebrate the holidays with the beautiful voices from Brookfield Central, Brookfield East and Muskego High School Women’s Choirs in a concert of holiday favorites with a Nordic flair.

PETER AND THE WOLF

2 p.m., Sun. Jan. 23, 2022

St. Luke’s Lutheran Church

Wisconsin Philharmonic’s contribution to this year’s Waukesha Janboree is an exciting performance of a new version of Prokofiev’s immortal work for children “Peter and the Wolf” with narration in English and Spanish.

EMERGING BRILLIANCE

2 p.m., Sunday, April 3, 2022

Oconomowoc Arts Center

A concert celebrating the amazing musical talents of composer Jacob Beranak, violinist Julian Rhee and violaist Tabitha Rhee. Selections include Beranak: To a Fleeting Flower; Mozart: Sinfonia Concertante and Bruckner: Symphony No. 4 in F-Flat, “Romantic”.

TICKETS:

Adult - \$39; Jan. 23 - \$10

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Terence Blanchard Featuring The E-Collective with Turtle Island Quartet **Nov 4, 2021**

Steve Winter: On the Trail of Big Cats **Nov 5, 2021**

Pilobolus Big Five Oh! **Nov 18, 2021**

Santa Saves Christmas! **Nov 21, 2021**

José Feliciano Feliz Navidad **Dec 4, 2021**

Filipe DeAndrade: Untamed **Jan 21, 2022**

Ladysmith Black Mambazo **Feb 1, 2022**

Black Violin **Feb 3, 2022**

Ballet Fólklórico De México **Feb 10, 2022**

Golden Dragon Acrobats **Feb 19, 2022**

Kobie Boykins: Exploring Mars **Feb 24, 2022**

Yamato **Mar 8, 2022**

Hiplet **Mar 9, 2022**

A Tribute to Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul **Mar 12, 2022**

Trinity Irish Dance Company **Mar 26, 2022**

Josh Gates **Apr 15, 2022**

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater **Apr 20, 2022**

Neil Berg's 50 Years of Rock-n-Roll **Apr 28, 2022**

Blue Man Group **Apr 30, 2022 & May 1, 2022**

Alicia Odewale—Greenwood: A Century of Resilience **May 26, 2022**

David Sanborn **Jun 10, 2022**

Jersey Boys **Jul 22, 2022 & July 23, 2022**

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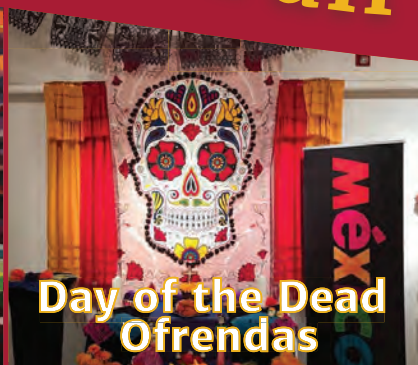
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NOVEMBER 12	PAUL SILBERGLEIT
NOVEMBER 27	CHRISTMAS WITH CANTUS
DECEMBER 17	MSO HOLIDAY CONCERT
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FEBRUARY 18	IRINA YANOVSKAYA DUO
FEBRUARY 23	A TRIBUTE TO PETULA CLARK
FEBRUARY 25	MARCYA DANEILLE
MARCH 4	TINKER BOYS
MARCH 18	SAM NESS
MARCH 20	FRANK ALMOND & ADAM NEIMAN
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Mutts Gone Nuts in
CANINE CABARET

Amplifying Voices

Sheri Williams Pannell makes theatre about Black Milwaukee life.

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER | PHOTO BY LAURA DIERBECK

“I see myself as a vessel for truth-telling,” says Sheri Williams Pannell. “I also see myself as an elder who must share knowledge so it’s carried on.

“I’m in my 60s and I’m grateful to have reached this time of my life and still have the opportunity to contribute to the arts in our community. I hope that if I’m able to pass on some of what I’ve learned, it will help others go to the next level.”

In the pandemic summer of 2020, Pannell cofounded the Milwaukee Black Theatre Festival with seminal Black Milwaukee theatre artists Malkia Stampley and Dimonte Henning along with Milwaukee Chamber Theatre’s artistic director Brent Hazelton, the festival’s producer. Pannell directed a virtual production of Samm Art-Williams’ “Home,” about a young Black Southern man’s search for something like the play’s title.

This year’s festival in August was presented live in the Broadway Theatre Center’s Cabot Theatre. The theme was “The Strength and Resilience of the Black Woman.” Pannell co-authored and directed “Black Butterflies.”

“La’Ketta Caldwell, Cynthia Cobb and I shared life stories which celebrated the joys of growing up in this city,” Pannell says. “It’s filled with, as we say, Black girl joy, Black girl magic. Yet because it’s about our truth, there’s enough life experience in it that anyone who sees it will relate to love, to loss, and to the resiliency we have as human beings to carry on.”

Pannell and Stampley, helped by Milwaukee Rep, founded the Bronzeville Arts Ensemble in 2013. When Stampley moved her base to New York, Pannell became artistic director and Black Arts MKE took the company under its wing. “We’ve concentrated on cultivating the performers, writers and directors in our Black community,” Pannell explains. “We recognize that, as my mother used to say, we have gold in our own backyard.”

Pannell, who also enjoys a long-running relationship with Skylight Music Theatre, says her long-range project is to complete

a trilogy of plays about Milwaukee’s Bronzeville, based on interviews with elder former residents of the once-thriving Black neighborhood on the near West Side that was deliberately demolished for freeway construction. First Stage produced the first chapter, “Welcome to Bronzeville,” in 2017. The second, “A Christmas in Bronzeville,” premieres this December, co-produced by First Stage, Live at St. John’s, and Bronzeville Arts Ensemble. “Farewell to Bronzeville” is in the works.

Pannell’s newest play, a co-production with Mothers Against Gun Violence, is based on interviews with survivors and the families of victims. “Voices of Gun Violence” premieres in February.

Her love for Milwaukee runs deep. “I love all of our different communities,” Pannell says. “It hurts me that we’re still so segregated, but I’m hoping that will change. Maybe this pandemic will help to encourage that, because we need each other to survive these times.

“I see some theatre companies making great strides, such as First Stage with their ‘Amplify’ series,” she continues. “I see others catching on, recognizing there’s beauty in sharing the stories of diverse voices — and not just diversity of culture but diversity of humankind in all its expressions. We must do this in order to understand one another, to gain a greater love and appreciation for each other. And what better vehicle than the arts?” **MKE**

On Sept. 25, Black Arts MKE will present “Beautiful You, Beautiful Me,” a captivating concert experience that features inspiring performances by local artists and speakers — among them Tasha Nicole, Sarah Fierek, Danva Johnson, Mel Spears, Keith Pulvermacher, Joe Jordan, and Melva Henderson — that offer a message of hope, self-worth and perseverance. Langston Hughes’ “Black Nativity,” directed by Henning, returns Dec. 9-12. For details and tickets, visit marcuscenter.org/series/black-arts-mke

“We’ve concentrated on
cultivating the performers,
writers and directors in
our Black community.”

— Sheri Williams Pannell



The Milwaukee Repertory Theater's "A Christmas Carol" at the historic Pabst Theater.



Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater/Michael Brosilow.

Reputation for **Excellence**

Milwaukee Repertory Theater moves forward with hope and renewed intent.

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER
PORTRAIT BY LAURA DIERBECK

Milwaukee Repertory Theater artistic director Mark Clements describes the 12-show 2021/22 season this way: "I'm very committed right now to the power of redemptive theatre. That pervades all of our programming, even the tough plays. Do they add something to our lives that is making us feel better, that is giving us hope?"

He believes that each of the season's pieces is celebratory, as well.

"When you look at history — at the Restoration plays, for example, that came out of Cromwellian Britain, which was a different kind of lockdown — or when plays came back after wars, or other times of hardship, the theatre and other live arts have

always gone through a renaissance of a kind because we realize how much we miss that shared experience," Clements reflects. "Live art becomes really necessary."

He's picked the Tony Award-winning "Titanic the Musical" as this season's musical.

"It's a beautiful score, and a lot of lives were lost and a lot of people survived," he explains. "You're celebrating the survivors and honoring the people who passed away. It's a real metaphor, in some ways, for where we've been. "There's even a special connection to a Rep staff member.

"Our managing director Melissa Vartanian's great-grandfather David Vartanian, on the night of his 25th birthday, was on the Titanic, clinging to the side of the

boat for the longest time before he passed out and someone pulled him aboard.”

The Powerhouse mainstage season opens in November with “Steel Magnolias,” a warmhearted comedy about female friends navigating trying times. Artistic producer Laura Braza directs with a fully female creative team. Playwright Lydia Diamond’s “Toni Stone” follows in January. It tells the story of the first woman to go pro in baseball’s Negro League.

“We’re producing a full season, but starting later and running later, and in a different order,” Clements explains. “The musical, the Shakespeare (“As You Like It”) and ‘Murder on the Orient Express’ would normally have been at the front of the season, but we’re pushing them to the spring to give us a chance to build up to speed. The Rep is the largest-producing theatre company in Wisconsin, bigger than many in Chicago. It’s a small village. It operates in four spaces, including ‘A Christmas Carol’ at the Pabst Theater, and serves 25,000 children off-site.”

And it’s a theatre with national significance — and, in Clements words, a broad church.

“Our mission is mostly a continuation of what it’s been,” he says. “Milwaukee Rep has been committed to a lot of the things that some organizations are starting to face for the first time. We were ensconced in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) activity long before the pandemic. Sixty percent of our performers for the last six or seven years have been people



Milwaukee Repertory
Theater artistic director
Mark Clements

“We’re producing a full season, but starting later and running later, and in a different order.”

— Mark Clements

of color. We’ve been looking at our creative teams, our new writers, and making sure we’re exploring issues that seem pertinent in our work. The three things we’re prioritizing now — EDI, new play development, and the capital campaign to reconfigure our building for this day and age — were set in 2019.”

Clements proudly notes that the Rep has been able to keep much of its staff employed through the pandemic, in part because of the longstanding absence of a deficit. The company also raised \$60,000 to help freelance artists who’ve worked with them in recent years.

And, Clements notes, not only first-time Rep patrons recognize this high-caliber company in a frequently underappreciated city. Visiting artists are often surprised by the greatness of Milwaukee’s art institutions, restaurants, hotels and lakefront — and the dismaying lack of national interest that helps keep the city affordable. The combination, he says, is reason so many artists choose to live here. **MKE**

Learn more at milwaukeeerep.com



Antonio Edwards
Suarez in the Rep's
“Antonio's Song / I Was
Dreaming of a Son.”

Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater/
Seth Freeman.

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FIGHT OR FLIGHT

October 30 – 31 & November 5 – 7
Original compositions by Sam Mullooly
Danceworks Studio Theatre

This concert offers a meditative exploration of movement and visuals that dive into the stress cycle, the nervous system and its various subdivisions. Influenced by the stressors of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Company aims to support our community struggling with mental health and general stress through a year-long mission that exposes how we can overcome these deeply wired roadblocks and reveal a path to a healthier future.

SONDER

January 27 – 30, 2022
Original compositions by Twin Talk
Next Act Theatre

In *Sonder*, Choreographer Gina Laurenzi welcomes live music to the stage as DPMKE dancers and Twin Talk share space, tune into one another and playfully delight in improvisation. Together, they will craft a blend of sound and movement guaranteed to set a mood and satisfy the senses.

SOBRIQUET

May 7 – 8 & May 13 – 15, 2022
Danceworks Studio Theatre

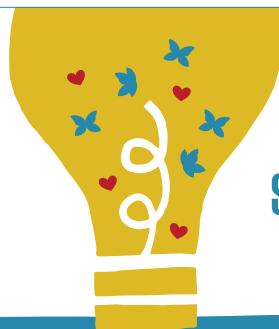
DPMKE performers and guest artists explore the impacts of labels, their danger to society, and the liberating effects of restructuring the societal labels around us. In a curious investigation of the internal assignment of ideas we apply to ourselves and others on a daily basis, Danceworks aims to heighten the voices of the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ company and community members.



1661 N. Water Street, MKE | 414.277.7470 | DanceworksMKE.org



Photo by DPMKE Artistic Director
Christal Wagner



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On Pointe

The city's internationally regarded Milwaukee Ballet returns with a "Season of Inspiration."

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER
PHOTOS BY LAURA DIERBECK



Milwaukee Ballet stands among the best ballet companies in the country. And when it returns to the freshly renovated Marcus Performing Arts Center in October, the dancers will be in top form, despite the impact of the pandemic on live performance.

"We had a powerful existence during COVID," says artistic director Michael Pink. "Our dancers grew in skill and strength. I think we're the only company around that managed to bring all our performers back on stage for four programs starting last December. They're ready to do this."

Dubbed the "Season of Inspiration," Pink says the ballet's 2021/2022 season is exactly that.

"As people begin to resume their new normal, they're searching for experiences to reawaken their senses and make them feel connected and inspired again," he explains. "As artists, this is when we leap into action with performances that will elevate them from the everyday and leave them feeling energized."

To that end, October's season debut, "Connect," clearly states its intention. It features contrasting world premieres made for these dancers by exciting international artists.

Darrell Grand Moultrie is an in-demand Black American choreographer who has previously made great contemporary-style work for the company. He and the dancers were halfway through this work's creation when COVID struck.

Danielle Rowe was a star in her native Australia. Now with the San Francisco Ballet, she's making a splash as a classical-style choreographer. She's delighted to make a new work here, Pink says.

"Connect" also features a fresh look at Italian choreographer Maura de Candia's very funny ballet "Purple Fools," made for the company dancers of 2012. It's a lighthearted satire on pretention.

The ballet's much-loved "Nutcracker" returns in December, followed by "Genesis" (Feb. 3-13) and "PUSH" (March 31-April 3), two additional mixed repertory programs of contemporary dance from award-winning choreographers.

The season will wrap in May with Pink's visually spectacular, emotionally engrossing imagining of "Beauty and Beast," which first dazzled audiences in 2018.

"Huge Potential Here"

Pink and his family came to Milwaukee from England 18 years ago for the artistic directorship. His "selfish reason," he says, is that he and his wife wanted a stable place to bring up their children. Beyond that, "I

"I think we're the only company around that managed to bring all our performers back on stage for four programs starting last December. They're ready to do this."

— Michael Pink, Milwaukee Ballet artistic director

could see huge potential here," Pink says. "I think people can see some of that potential realized in our new building, in our position within the cultural identity of this city. The Ballet is unique in terms of its offerings. Two of our original productions were filmed and screened nationally."

The reason he stays, says Pink — who recently extended his contract through 2026 — "is because we're not done. Our survival through COVID was largely because of who we are, our building, the way we work, and the level of commitment of the resident company."

Pink is also hopeful that ongoing growth throughout the city — and especially in the greater downtown area — will bring additional interest in Milwaukee's well-established and multifaceted arts scene. "This company and this city and our arts scene cry out for more recognition," he says. "Hopefully, through continued economic development in the city, maybe — just maybe — more people will learn more about the city. I was hopeful that having the Democratic Convention here would raise the city's profile internationally, or that the Calatrava would tip the balance in favor of this as a city to visit, so people would discover what a beautiful city Milwaukee is."

"That's what I wish for the city now, as it grows out of the crisis," Pink continues. "It really is building momentum. There's land, there's space, there's talent — everything you'd want. We just have to get on the other side of the bad rap this city gets because of where it's placed, and the segregation and violence."

"We produce amazing things here art-wise and quality-of-life-wise. And we can solve those other issues. None of them have completely brought us down." **MKE**



Classically MKE

For the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and Florentine Opera, a time of stillness ends in vivid new seasons.

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER

Imagine you're in your seat at the gorgeous new Bradley Symphony Center. The conductor has entered. The orchestra's ready. After a pause to gather himself, the conductor lifts the baton. Your breath stops. There's a deep hush in the room, a thrill of expectation shared by everyone in the great hall. Then, a flick of the baton ... and the music gathers you in.

Or you're seated in the newly refreshed Marcus Performing Arts Center. The curtain slowly rises on a world-renowned Broadway musical or soul-stirring opera. Your breathing changes, different brain cells activate, and you're in that place where only live performance takes you.

Even if you know this music well — in fact, especially then — it's a moment-by-moment adventure, one that 2020 stole away and 2021 offers like a longed-for gift.

For fans of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and the Florentine Opera, the 2021-2022 seasons look spectacular. The MSO's music director Ken-David Masur and the Florentine's general director and CEO Maggey Oplinger have met this uncertain moment in history with great sensitivity.

"I've been proud to be a part of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra during this time of reimagining how we share music with our community," Masur says in announcing his "Classics Season."

"Now we're ready for a new beginning in this stunning hall. Our season includes works specially curated to reveal the glorious

"I've been proud to be a part of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra during this time of reimagining how we share music with our community,"

— Ken-David Masur, MSO's music director



Ken-David Masur

Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra



Frank Almond

Photo courtesy of Jennifer Brindley

acoustics of our new space, from symphonic cornerstones to new pieces. The opening of our new hall was thrust into a time of change that has given us the gift of deeply reexamining the makeup of what is considered standard repertoire or yet-to-be-discovered repertoire. The orchestra and I are excited to share in this journey of musical discovery with you."

Classic Meets Contemporary

The MSO's season opener will not only debut its new home to those in the live audience, but also to Milwaukee PBS viewers on Oct. 2. "A Grand Opening" runs three nights, Oct. 1-3, featuring George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," Duke Ellington's "New World A-Comin'," and Igor Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite" — divine works all — paired with the contemporary Black English composer James B. Wilson's "Green Fuse." The performance will also include a commissioned world premiere by American composer Eric Nathan, who smiles at tradition while nudging it forward. Each concert joins classical works that have shaped our thinking with new works that open it.

The second concert, "Frank Almond Plays Bruch," returns the MSO's beloved violin genius to his former comrades Oct. 15 and 16. Along with Bruch's "First Violin Concerto," the concert includes Rachmaninoff's "Symphonic Dances," and the free-form float of "Aeriality" by the contemporary Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir.

Oct. 22-23 is a concert featuring celebrated young French cellist Edgar Moreau. It features classics by Ravel, Falla, Lalo and Chabrier, along with "Three Latin-American Dances" by the young American Gabriela Lena Frank, whose works explore her multicultural ancestry.

The season's fourth performance, staged Nov. 4-7, is titled "Andreas Delfs Returns," and brings back the conductor laureate (now music director with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra) to the Milwaukee stage in a program that includes Grieg's "Piano Concerto" and "Something in the Dark" by the genre-bending American Sarah Kirkland Snider.

Additional season highlights include a "30s Festival" in January and February, featuring compositions from the era — the decade the Warner Grand Theatre was built. Works by Gershwin, Ives and Barber are included. The highlight of that festival for me is the return of cabaret artist Michael Feinstein to Milwaukee in the MSO's Pops series. Accompanying himself on piano, Feinstein sings standards from the "Great American Songbook" with incomparable understanding. An April Pops concert by Ann Hampton Calloway, "The Streisand Songbook" (whose title says it all!) would be a close second.

There's also a Motown concert, a Beatles concert and, of course, Holiday Pops.

The most radical and ambitious plan for the season is the March 25-27 performance of Edvard Grieg's complete score for Henrik Ibsen's fantastical fairy tale "Peer Gynt," a deeply romantic and highly satirical play I love beyond measure. MSO productions are extremely rare, and this will be "semi-staged" with eight costumed actors (there are a legion of characters), a puppet, props, a soprano soloist and the Symphony Chorus.

The Florentine Soars

The Florentine Opera feels new — younger and more inclusive — since Maggey Oplinger took the reins in 2019. That's been true even of the recent digital productions.

The Opera's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion in every aspect of the operation is detailed in two long statements on its website. It includes a pledge "to become educated voices in organizational anti-racism," and to complete a plan to embrace diversity in all its hiring practices by this September. Twenty-eight percent of this season's creative teams and onstage talent are composed of the historically underrepresented. The current studio artists are entirely people of color, and they play vital roles in the mainstage season and outreach programs.

The season opens Oct. 8 with Verdi's "Rigoletto." It's as traditional as operas come, but this production has a modern

sensibility. The director is an Israeli woman, Omer Ben Seadia, who's internationally admired for her fresh takes on the classics. Francesco Miliot, another young and rising star and now the Florentine's Artistic Advisor, will conduct the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and Florentine Opera Chorus.

The Studio Artists will perform "Zarzuella: Luisa Fernanda" in the Wilson Theatre at Vogal Hall in February. "Zarzuella" is a Spanish musical theatre genre with song, dance, and spoken scenes. This particular example is described as comic melodrama with political overtones.

Milwaukee's Jill Anna Ponasi, the artistic director of Milwaukee Opera Theatre and a popular guest director for Skylight Music Theatre, will direct the Studio Artists in an evening of two one-acts. They are Pauline Viardot's made-for-adults retelling of the "Cinderella" story, and Viardot's fan Maurice Ravel's dream play, "The Child and The Enchantments," with a libretto by the French woman author Colette (best known for "Gigi"). This enticing show gets a two-weekend run in March.

The climax arrives in May. It's Puccini's "La Boheme," but set in Milwaukee's Bronzeville in the 1940s. Milwaukee playwright, director and Bronzeville expert Sheri Williams Parnell will insure accuracy as dramaturg. The compelling murals of Milwaukee visual artist Ras 'Ammar Nsoroma will grace the set. The Boys and Girls Clubs Chorus joins the Florentine Chorus. All the stellar artists in the leading roles are Black.

So settle into your seat as the lights dim, the crowd begins to hush and the anticipation builds... MKE



Maggey Oplinger

Photo courtesy of The Florentine Opera

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Danceworks Performance MKE artistic director Christal Wagner has robust plans for the troupe's upcoming season.

Photo courtesy of Danceworks

Works in Progress

Danceworks is Milwaukee's major hub for modern and contemporary dance performance and new music — and an arts incubator too.

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER

For Danceworks, dance and other forms of artistic expression truly do work to create community bonds.

The all-ages, all-styles dance school opened its groundbreaking professional Danceworks Performance Company in 1997. A decade later, Dani Kuepper accepted the role of artistic director, and with each year of her leadership, the company grew in importance and range. In 2019, Kuepper expanded and diversified the membership to better represent Milwaukee, changing the group's name to Danceworks Performance MKE (DPMKE).

Kuepper resigned last winter, and company member Christal Wagner accepted the directorship. Wagner has performed in every DPMKE show since 2007. In that time, she also co-founded the experimental dance and music trio Cadance Collective, and has become a highly respected dance filmmaker. A Ripon native — and, like so many in Milwaukee's dance community, a graduate of UWM's distinguished dance program — she credits Kuepper as her greatest mentor.

Keenly aware of DPMKE's stature in Milwaukee's dance world, Wagner is grateful that the company's full cast of hard-working dance professionals will return for the upcoming three-show season. Wagner will choreograph the first show, opening October 30. Company choreographer Gina Laurenzi will create the winter concert. And spring will bring "a collective concert by all the members who want to contribute choreography," Wagner says.

Her fall show is titled "Fight or Flight." "It's about the nervous system," Wagner explains. "I'm taking a scientific approach to helping myself and our dancers, and then the community, understand how it works. The reason is that I've been having some nervous system dysfunction during this past year of COVID."

"I'm reading, right now, about burn out," Wagner tells me. "People who suffer from that don't necessarily have the completion of the stress cycle. It's completed through laughter, through crying, through hugging and physical touch. People need to be educated about that. I need to be educated, and I'm a dancer who works on my body on a daily basis. I hope that part of the concert will serve as an educational moment for the audience to collectively breathe and meditate together as they watch."

The show's music is by Milwaukee composer Sam Mullooly, who also sings with the impeccable a capella choir Aperi Animam. Wagner describes his score as "a cohesive electronic work that's meditatively beautiful and goes on little journeys. I'm usually drawn to music that's rhythmic and driving. This is completely the opposite."

For Laurenzi's concert of new original work, the Chicago-based contemporary jazz trio Twin Talk will perform their music live. The concert is titled "Sonder," a word invented by writer John Koenig that means "the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own."

"Many of our dancers are also choreographers," Wagner says. "Our spring concert is about labels, the ones we wear and the ones that are unseen. A lot of our dancers are queer. Some are BIPOC and I'm looking to expand that. It's important to work with people who have compelling stories and it's important that our dancers' stories are heard. That concert is for our LGBTQ and BIPOC dancers to speak on labels."

All fourteen member-artists are prolific.

Laurenzi and Joshua Yang have their own dance companies. Laurenzi leads Danceworks Youth Performance Company. Kim Johnson heads Danceworks DanceLAB, which presents public showcases for independent area dance artists to test work-in-progress, and celebrates area hip-hop dance creators in annual editions of "Ignite: A Hip Hop Dance Experience." Katelyn Altmann, Elizabeth Roskopf and Maggie Seer are members of Debra Loewen's pioneering site specific Wild Space Dance Company. Gabi Sustache is a Danceworks on Tap star. Melissa Anderson brings her life in ballet to the work.

And the collective's impact is impressively wide reaching. Through its combined creative efforts, Danceworks serves more than 55,000 children, adults and seniors every year. **MKE**



Danceworks welcomes students of all ages and dance styles.

Photo by Laura Dierbeck

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Image: Sixteen Paths, 2021. Photo credit: Daniel McCullough.

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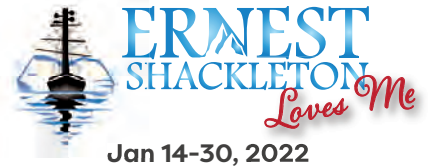
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Action Through Dance

For the artists of DanceCircus, performance and preserving the environment make a perfect pair.

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER | PHOTO BY LAURA DIERBECK

There's nothing trendy about performance artist Betty Salamun's focus on the climate crisis. The natural environment has been her subject and inspiration for the 46 years that her performance company, DanceCircus, has been active.

Salamun makes in-your-body activist performance art that doesn't translate well to video — you have to be there. As Salamun puts it, “Being under COVID is like, aaggh!” Nonetheless, her recent video works have allowed her to show the city neighborhoods, parks and waterways that are her settings and subjects.

She works with “movers” of all ages, races, gender identities, abilities, shapes and sizes, including well-trained freelance dancers and first-rate musicians and poets, depending on the project. These range from “Monarchs, Mounds, Migrations” — a fully produced dance, live music and spoken word performance that takes a long view on human migration, multiculturalism, and our many similarities to currently endangered monarch butterflies — to her minimalist outdoor “splash dances,” a play on words of the 1983 film “Flashdance.”

Salamun arranges flash mobs of movers of all kinds, including would-be viewers, to dance together for a common purpose; in this case, to inspire a “water ethic” that supports the life-sustaining conservation of Milwaukee's waterways. While repeating easy-to-pick-up movement patterns, participants might chant a phrase like “all life depends on water.” Live music often accompanies them.

This kind of art could not be further from elite. Given that the climate crisis demands changes in everyday actions, Salamun creates an everyday art form meant for everyone, including unsuspecting passers-by and, importantly, for children.

This fall, she'll continue her work with Neighborhood House. This North Side community center has an environmental education program meant to inspire “critical thinking and a sense of stewardship for the environment.” Guided by skilled poets, the teenagers write and record poetry about their neighborhoods. Their poetry becomes the accompaniment for dancing.

“We go out with a videographer, create dances and video them in the streets, on street corners, alleys, in front of murals, or wherever we can find something that's related to the poems the kids wrote,” Salamun explains.

She'll also continue to work with the Northwest Side Community Development Committee in a partnership instigated by Imagine MKE, the increasingly vital artist support organization which serves area artists and art institutions at every level.

For the 2021 United Nation's World Water Day in March, the Northwest Side CDC held a walk in the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park on N. 48th Street in Milwaukee. “We danced with the people who did that walk, around the park and down

Lincoln Creek,” Salamun says. “And there were two speakers. One talked about how Harriet Tubman used the waterways to help slaves escape. The other was a staff scientist who talked about how the creek will be cleaned up, and how they're reducing flooding by building storm water basins.”

And so for Earth Day in April, she made performance art in the storm water basins.

For Unite Wisconsin's Community Resource Fair in June, Salamun brought a four-part “Global Water Dance” with a watery call-and-response accompaniment by Milwaukee composer Shari Lauter. “They had people there to help with heating and rent assistance and with health, and people there about art projects going on in the community — just a really nice event,” Alamun says.

They also took the work to Harbor Plaza, the park adjacent to UWM's School of Freshwater Science. “It's on the working harbor,” she says. “It's a place to show what real waterways are.”

If you are wondering why “DanceCircus,” the “circus” is the ancient Roman word meaning circle. Salamun makes modern versions of ancient communal rituals. Consider her a down-to-earth priestess. **MKE**

Learn more at dancecircus.org



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Woman Kind

Renaissance Theaterworks continues its mission of uplift and inclusion.

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER
PHOTO COURTESY OF RENAISSANCE
THEATREWORKS

Susan Fete has guided Renaissance Theaterworks through 28 seasons, first as one of five women cofounders, then one of a trio of artistic leaders, and, for many years now, as artistic director. She keeps the collective process alive with a community play selection committee and consultations with women theatre leaders across the country.

The big news now is the company's move from the Broadway Theatre Center's 99-seat studio to a bigger, better home at 255 S. Water St., which is also the home of Next Act Theatre. Next Act's founder and artistic director David Cessarini is a good friend, and their companies shared a makeshift Third Ward space in the early years. The pandemic delayed the move, but also provided time to dream about the possibilities of their renewed partnership.

"I've known David for 30 years. He's a wonderful collaborative partner, and it's such a beautiful space," Fete says. "He takes such excellent care of it. And it has more seats."

Like many theatres, Fete turned last season's plan into this one's. The theme — more resonant now — is "What Really Matters?" It opens Sept. 7-8 with "Brink!," the company's annual play development program offering staged readings of new works by Midwestern women, followed by a discussion.

Then Fete directs Bekah Brunstetter's "The Cake," a comedy inspired by an inflammatory case a few years back. A religiously conservative woman baker is asked by her goddaughter to bake a wedding cake for her same-sex marriage.

"It shows what happens when you have people that think really different, but love each other," Fete says. The playwright suggests that everyone — the rules of COVID



The Renaissance Theatreworks performance of "Top Girls" in 2018 featured (from left) Cassie Bissell as Marlene, Elyse Edelman as Angie and Mary MacDonald Kerr as Mrs. Kidd.

permitting — should be served a slice of cake after the show. "We're definitely going to do that. I think it would be really fun to have rainbow cake."

"I love doing plays that create a place for discussion," she continues. "It's really easy — and I'm the queen of this — to demonize people. But when a wonderful playwright shows you how every person in the story comes to their position, you don't have to change your mind. You just have to be willing to have a conversation. I think we need much more of that in our world. And isn't that how change starts? Much as I hate to admit it, I've never changed anyone's mind by railing at them."

Fete is proud to note that Renaissance has always looked to produce and perform plays that, she says, "have unusual heroes, plays whose stories aren't told all the time."

"That can be LGBTQ people. It can be BIPOC people, disabled people, and women of all kinds," she continues. "That's not to shame anyone who's not doing that. But there are great stories that don't get told, that help

us learn about different people and different ways of being. You see what happens to your own heart. You feel your heart open. You understand what you didn't understand before. And you see it with other people — and that's the best feeling in the world."

Fete calls Milwaukee's arts community the most cooperative and supportive she has ever experienced.

"Talking to friends in other parts of the country, I know that it's unique," she adds.

And she's doing her part to make sure that artists continue to work and audiences can return to venues to appreciate that work firsthand. She had her nursing license reinstated in January so she could vaccinate people, and is doing that still.

"I could come back to the other arts groups and say that we're vaccinating people as fast as we can," she says. "We just have to hold out a little bit longer. And we're going to come out tighter because of what we've just been through together." **MKE**

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