

The theater scene in Minneapolis and St. Paul

Explore the arts during the ACRL National Conference

by Julia Kelly

If you haven't been to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul before, you might have heard of our lakes, parks, and, of course, the snow. Add to that a vibrant and diverse theater scene, with more than 25 venues and more than 50 theater companies. Two of them, the Guthrie Theater and the Children's Theater Company, are recipients of Tony awards for regional theater.

Perhaps the most famous theater in the Twin Cities is the Guthrie Theater, named for its founder, Broadway director Sir Tyrone Guthrie. With a resident acting company, the Guthrie puts on about ten plays a year, ranging from classics by Shakespeare

or Tennessee Williams to works by new playwrights. In 2003, the Guthrie premiered the new Arthur Miller play, *Resurrection Blues*.

The Guthrie is currently located less than a mile from the conference hotels, although a new multi-stage building is under construction near the Mississippi Riverfront at the other end of downtown Minneapolis.

The Twin Cities are a frequent destination for national

touring companies presenting Broadway productions. During the conference, St. Paul's Ordway Center McKnight Theater will be hosting *My Way: A Musical Tribute to Frank*



The Guthrie Theatre is located just a few blocks from the conference hotels.

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Sinatra, while the Orpheum Theater in Minneapolis will be featuring *The Lion King*.

Venues in Minneapolis, many near the ACRL Conference hotels

A number of smaller companies may be found on both sides of the Mississippi, from the downtown areas to the outer suburbs. In Minneapolis, a number of theaters are a short cab ride from the conference hotels.

The Children's Theater Company focuses on productions of interest to playgoers young and old. Housed at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (site of the ACRL All-Conference Reception), this comfortable venue features plenty of room between rows for young attendees to move about. In addition to the productions, more than 800 students participate in the company's Theater Arts Training program. Recent productions include *Pippi Longstocking*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.

The Jungle Theater, in the Uptown area south of downtown, has a newly remodeled, intimate setting within a block of several reasonably priced ethnic restaurants. The 2005 season was not announced in time for this publication, but recent offerings include classics as well as works by young playwrights.

Mixed Blood Theater, near the University of Minnesota campus, is a professional multiracial theater company promoting cultural pluralism. During conference, they will be performing *Take Me Out*, a 2003 Tony Award winner.

The Illusion Theater in downtown Minneapolis features a Fresh Ink series each summer, with new plays by local and regional artists.

Theater in the Round, a small venue with a thrust stage, is also near the University of Minnesota. Performances are a mix of classics from authors such as Shakespeare and Chekhov to local premieres; in early April, a comedy called *Apartment 3A* will be playing.

The University of Minnesota's theater and dance group's Mainstage performances are very reasonably priced, and during the conference, they will be performing *The Laramie Project*.

Brave New Workshop, a comedy theater focusing on social and political satire, recently celebrated its 45th anniversary. Recent performances include *Minnesota: It's Not Just for Lutherans Anymore*. Theatre de la Jeune Lune, a company with a strong French connection, strives "to create an entirely new kind of theater that is immediate, high spirited, passionately physical, and visually spectacular." In early April 2005, Jeune Lune will be performing *The Little Prince*.

Selected theater performances during ACRL's Annual Conference

***As You Like It* by William Shakespeare**

Guthrie Theater
www.guthrietheater.org/

Take Me Out

Mixed Blood Theater
www.mixedblood.com/

The Lion King

Orpheum Theatre
www.state-orpheum.com/

Stage Directions

Penumbra Theater
www.penumbra theatre.org/

The Little Prince

Theatre de la Jeune Lune
www.jeunelune.com/

Apartment 3A

Theater in the Round
www.theatreintheround.org

The Laramie Project

University Theater: Mainstage
www.clu.umn.edu/theatre/season/mainstage.html

Also in Minneapolis, but a bit further from the conference center, there are a number of other companies, including In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater. These are no ordinary puppets—many are six-to-eight feet tall. Pillsbury House Theatre, in south Minneapolis, is a small theater that features area premiers as well as classics, often tackling social issues.

The Bryant Lake Bowl, in the Uptown area, is a trendy combination bowling alley/restaurant/theater that highlights comic performances and local talent.

Venues in St. Paul and other local communities

St. Paul is home to the Great American History Theatre, which focuses on plays with a connection to the historical aspects of Minnesota and the region. Recent plays have covered the topics of immigrants, racism, and celebrities with local connections.

Penumbra Theater's mission is "to create professional productions that are artistically excellent, thought provoking, relevant, entertaining, and presented from an African American perspective." Each year they put on a holiday production entitled *Black Nativity*, which is rich in dance and evolves from year to year. During the conference they will be performing *Stage Directions*, a play that examines egos, tempers, and sexual politics against the backdrop of the theater world.

The Old Log Theater in Excelsior, a western suburb of Minneapolis, started as a summer stock theater in 1940 in a log stable. The beautiful log venue that they currently inhabit includes a restaurant, and the company focuses on contemporary comedies.

The Chanhassen Dinner Theatre, also west of the city, is really an entertainment complex with several theaters. It is a dinner theater and the productions include musical reviews as well as classic musical theater.

Special interest theater groups

Outward Spiral Theatre Company features

productions that focus on the lives, issues, and points-of-view of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people and their allies. They perform at the Loring Playhouse, not far from the conference hotels.

Mu Performing Arts is a group that has a wide range of offerings focusing in the lives of Asian Americans, from Taiko drumming to play readings to musical performances.

The Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company, based in St. Paul, focuses on "telling stories of our common search for identity in a multicultural world." Recent productions include *The Chosen* and *Talley's Folly*.

Founded in 1963, the Minnesota Opera performs at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul. Although no performances will be taking place during conference, the Minnesota Opera's 2004–05 season includes *Madame Butterfly* and *Nixon in China*.

The Minnesota Fringe Festival is a ten-day summer festival with hundreds of performances at more than 20 different venues. It is the largest fringe festival in the country.

Obtaining tickets

Although a few theater companies in the Twin Cities use Ticketmaster as their sales agent, a number of them use a local company called TicketWorks, which does not add a service charge to the ticket prices.

Discount tickets to many theater and music performances are available from TC Tix. The majority of tickets are for events out just a day or two, but a few are for events out a week or more. Tickets must be purchased in person; one of the TC Tix outlets is at Marshall Field's in downtown Minneapolis, just four blocks up the Nicollet Mall. ■

Links to Web sites available online

Make sure to visit the online version of this article for links to the Web sites of the venues listed here (www.ala.org/acrl, select "C&RL News" from the Quicklinks dropdown menu).