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The Festival Season

By JONATHAN B. WEINBACH

The next few weeks mark the beginning of the summer festival season. Perhaps the biggest and most famous of them, the huge Spoleto Festival, begins in Charleston, S.C., on May 28; downtown Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Festival, turning 29 this year, starts a week later on June 4. But true art lovers will be getting a plane: big art fairs in Basel, Switzerland and London are slated for next month.

Here's a guide to high-culture celebrations taking place during the summer season.

Spoleto Festival USA

May 28-June 13

Charleston, S.C.

843-723-0402

www.spoletousa.org

Visitors to Spoleto, and downtown Charleston, have their pick of the performing arts: Classical ballet, modern (and postmodern) dance, opera, choral music, jazz and theater are among the genres represented. Nearly all the shows, including the "Charles Wadsworth: A Gala Celebration" concert on June 1, will be housed in one of Charleston's many historic venues. Middleton Place, site of the Festival's outdoor finale on June 13, is a preserved 18th-century plantation once owned by Arthur Middleton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Other highlights: "Ricky Jay and His 52 Assistants," a one-man show directed by David Mamet, will be staged May 28 through June 1. Ticket prices vary by event.

Other Festivals

Laguna Beach Art Festival

Laguna Beach, CA

July 1-August 29

949-494-4514

www.art-a-fair.com

Edinburgh International Festival

Edinburgh, Scotland

August 15-Sept. 4

44-131-473-2000

www.eif.co.uk

Festival of American Folklife

Washington, D.C.

June 23 - July 4

Three Rivers Arts Festival

June 4-20

Gateway Center

Downtown Pittsburgh

412-281-8723

www.artsfestival.net

Every Spring since 1960, Pittsburgh gets an arts infusion courtesy of this festival, which dominates downtown and the nearby Point State Park. The event's trademark "Artist's Market" attracts more than 160 booths and 400 artists over 17 days. There's public art aplenty, and it's hard to imagine a broader selection of music -- everything from nouveau Yiddish (the Klezmatics on June 19) to Caribbean swing (Cubanismo! on June 11) to energetic honky-tonk (Ruthie and the Wranglers on June 7). Concerts on the seven outdoor stages are free.

202-357-1300
www.si.edu/folklife

1999 AmericanDance Festival
Durham, N.C.
June 10-July 24
919-684-4444
www.americandancefestival.org

Saint Louis Art Fair
Saint Louis, MO
September 17-19
314-863-0278
www.saintlouisartfair.com

South Norwalk Arts Celebration
South Norwalk, CT
August 7-8
203-866-7916
www.sonoarts.org

Brooking Summer Arts Festival
Brookings, S.D.
July 10-11
605-697-5222
www.bsaf.com

The Stratton Arts Festival
Manchester Center, VT
September 18-October 17
802-362-0929
www.strattonartsfestival.org

in Providence. There's also some novel performance art planned: During the evening of June 12, the Gilbert & Woodward group will perform and display "Traffic in Memory" at the intersection of Westminster and Weybosset streets. Theirs is a 25-minute show billed as an "oversize-object spectacle." (Wear your aesthetic seat belt.) On June 13, Slovenian "acid jazz" musicians Planet Groove will perform at the Waterplace Park amphitheater. Concerts are free.

The International Art Fair

June 16-21
Basel, Switzerland
212-627-1455
41-61-686-2020
www.art.ch

Right on the heels of the Grosvenor House fair is this grand event, which draws modern-art and contemporary-art enthusiasts from around the globe. In this small, picturesque Swiss city, works by more than 1,000 artists will be on display at the city's fair site, as will special exhibits devoted to video art and sculpture. The event, celebrating its 30th anniversary, serves as an indicator of the art market, and there will be plenty for moneyed collectors to chose from: Works by Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro and Andy Warhol are among those up for sale this year, along with thousands of less-expensive works by artists of the moment. Tickets: about \$40 for day passes, about \$10 for evening admission and \$15 for students.

The Grosvenor House

Art and Antiques Fair
June 9-15
Grosvenor House
Park Lane
London
44-171-495-8743
www.grosvenor-antiquesfair.co.uk

June is "London Season" for the art world, and 86 of the world's top art and antiques dealers come to show off their best wares at this event. The fair is "vetted" -- all the items have been examined by one (or a few) of 140 specialists employed by the fair, so buyers, organizers say, can rest "safe in the knowledge of their impeccable quality." This year's show will have a fin-de-siecle vibe, with numerous items available from the end of earlier centuries. Also on display, but not for sale: selections from the surrealist-art collection of Englishman Edward James. Visitors can view Salvador Dali's "Lips" sofa, Dali's "Lobster" telephone and Rene Magritte's "La Malediction." Tickets: about \$20 for individual admission, which includes a fair handbook. Free for children under 12.

Convergence International Art Festival

June 11-20
Providence, R.I.
401-621-1992
www.caparts.org/convergence

This 10-day festival, now in its 12th year, has grown significantly since the city's Waterplace Park and River Walk opened three years ago. This year, organizers have commissioned sculptors to install works at several public plazas

Lincoln Center Festival '99

July 7-25

Lincoln Center

Broadway and 65th Street

New York

212-875-5928

www.lincolncenter.org/festival99

The city's largest performing-arts institution has been hosting summer arts celebrations since 1996, and this year's three-week, 113-performance calendar includes some especially nontraditional fare: gospel, Chinese opera and Vietnamese musical theater. The highlight may be "The Peony Pavillion," a six-part, 20-hour marathon to be performed over four days. Last year, the Chinese government prevented the work's performance at the festival because it deemed the show full of "feudal superstitions, absurdity and pornography." At Lincoln Center, it's also a good year to be an Irish-theater fan, and in particular, a Brian Friel fan -- three of the playwright's works will be performed by Irish companies. Also worth noting: "Kayassine," the U.S. debut of an "aerial ballet" from the French group Les Arts Sauts. The show takes place in a 60-foot-high tent, and attendees can stretch on lounge chairs while the group performs. Ticket prices vary by event.

Contemporary American Theater Festival

July 9-August 1

Shepherd College

Shepherdstown, W.Va.

800-999-2283

www.catf.org

Since 1991, the Mountain state has hosted this celebration of new American theater. The festival takes place at Shepherd College, located about 75 minutes from Washington, D.C. This summer's schedule includes four premieres, as well as panels and discussion groups -- speakers include Sister Helen Prejean, author of "Dead Man Walking." Among the theatrical debuts: Julia Jordan's "Tatjana in Color," published in "Best Women Playwrights of 1997," examines painter Egon Schiele's relationship with a young model, and Wendy McLeod's "The Water Children" confronts the abortion debate through Megan, an actress offered a chance to star in a right-to-life commercial. Tickets: \$66 for a "CATCard," which provides admission to all four plays; \$100 for "member" admission, which includes an Opening Night reception.

Talking Head / Bill Ivey

Bill Ivey, who was named chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts last year after heading the Country Music Federation, recently launched an initiative to try to integrate the arts in America more fully into community life. The Grammy-nominated NEA chairman picks his favorite cultural events of the past season.

The San Francisco Symphony's 'Gershwin' Tour: *"Hearing [conductor] Michael Tilson Thomas play piano on 'Rhapsody in Blue' was just special. I don't think I'd seen him play piano before, and in that performance I heard things that I hadn't heard ever before. The whole concert was great."*

'Fool Moon': *"It's a show with Bill Irwin and David Shiner. They do a kind of physical comedy with elements of mime and classic vaudevillian technique. And their show is accompanied by a band called the Red Clay Ramblers, who've managed to modernize the old-time string-band form. It was an evening of comedy and theater that was really unique."*

'Van Gogh's Van Goghs': *"The exhibit [now on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art] was in Washington and Los Angeles, and it was one of the most beautiful museum installations I've ever seen. They tailored each physical setting in the museum to each painting. They were able to tell his story without a great deal of material. Anyone who wants to see his evolution as an artist should see this exhibit."*

'The American Century: 1900-1950': *This exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New*

York "does such a fine job of linking art with American history, of linking elements of Pop art and design with more traditional painting and photography, era by era. What pleased me most were the great juxtapositions - like a film clip from 'The Wizard of Oz' with photos from the Depression period."

'Drums Along the Potomac' : *"It was a classical-percussion festival organized by the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington. The show that I attended featured [British percussionist] Evelyn Glennie, [who] did all kinds of things -- including different costumes -- to turn the symphony stage into a great performance space. I told [National Symphony Orchestra] Maestro Leonard Slatkin that it was a night that people will remember 10 years from now."*

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