

PICCOLO SPOLETO

2023

May 26-June 11

Official
Program
Guide

FIRST OF TWO

Black Mermaids
exhibit offers works to
combat 'Disney cutesieness'

**Seed & Feed
Marching
Abominable**
brings tradition,
family fun
to Charleston

Gatsby Orchestra
celebrates 100 years
of 'The Charleston'

PICCOLO PICKS

Outdoor Art
Exhibition

Chatham
Baroque

Lowcountry
Voices
presents
Black
Broadway

And more!

A special
publication of



Piccolo Spoleto

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Welcome!

I invite you to join us in celebrating 45 years of the Piccolo Spoleto Festival, Charleston's annual celebration of our local arts community. Produced by the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs, Piccolo Spoleto is the longstanding complement to the world renowned Spoleto Festival USA. Each season, the festival brings together a varied line-up of exhibitions, performances, educational programs and culturally inspired fun that encourages us all to come together and experience something truly exceptional.



Piccolo Spoleto strives to offer something for everyone over the course of 17 days and nights, bringing the arts to life in our galleries and theatres, historic houses of worship, public plazas, courtyards and gardens, and, of course, the City's beloved and beautiful parks. It is a Charleston tradition that endures and grows richer with each new season.



As we mark this milestone year, we are excited by many of our festival traditions, from our curtain raising Sunset Serenade concert with the Charleston Symphony at the US Custom House, to the Piccolo Spoleto Outdoor Art Exhibition at Marion Square. Equally, we welcome new offerings like our Piccolo on King block party and an ever-expanding roster of pop-up events and exhibitions. Piccolo Spoleto exists in a constant state of reinvention, and each season is a reflection of both grand aspirations and small gestures. I hope you will relish everything the festival has to offer.

The arts have demonstrated remarkable resolve and resilience in recent years, and we salute Charleston's artists and audiences alike for their commitment to cultural vibrancy. Piccolo Spoleto is a direct reflection of the

dedication and generosity of artists and arts enthusiasts throughout our community, and I want to acknowledge all of the outstanding artists and appreciative audience members who will make the 2023 Piccolo Spoleto Festival an resounding success. I also want to thank the staff of the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs and the team of dedicated community volunteers and arts leaders who bring Piccolo Spoleto to life.

Enjoy every minute of our long-playing Piccolo Spoleto Festival as it continues to spin 45 years on, proudly ablaze with unbridled creativity, artistic excellence and an infectious groove. It is always such an amazing time of the year in Charleston as music, joy and laughter spill out beyond our concert halls and auditoriums, transforming our city with artistry, whimsy and fun. Please be sure to join us, and bring along your family, friends and neighbors. I look forward to seeing you all at Piccolo Spoleto.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John J. Tecklenburg".

John J. Tecklenburg
Mayor

About the Festival

The Piccolo Spoleto Festival annually presents a varied program that includes visual arts exhibitions, performances of classical music, jazz, dance, theater and choral music, as well as cultural events and community celebrations, poetry readings, children’s activities, craft shows and film screenings.

Piccolo Spoleto prioritizes accessibility for both artists and performers, presenting professional work of the highest standard, while ensuring that nearly half of Piccolo’s events are admission-free, with the balance offered at affordable prices.

In addition to the Festival’s visual arts, artisan crafts exhibitions and public art installations, performances are being planned for outdoor settings in Charleston’s parks. Events are scheduled for the City’s larger parks in formats that accommodate social distancing and smaller neighborhood pop-up events will be announced the week of the event to ensure that the weather will accommodate the performance.

Piccolo Spoleto was launched in 1979 by the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs, which continues to work closely with an engaged group of volunteers from the Charleston arts community. The working group of arts professionals who serve as volunteer program coordinators for the festival now numbers nearly 40 with each specializing in a particular discipline, genre or period.

Applications for the 2024 Piccolo Spoleto Festival will be available online in the autumn at **PiccoloSpoleto.com**.

For more information, call the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs at (843) 724-7305 or email CulturalAffairs@charleston-sc.gov.

Festival Staff

Piccolo Spoleto Festival is produced and directed by the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs

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Piccolo Spoleto salutes its recent sponsors



Piccolo Spoleto

celebrates local talent, area acts

By Chloe Hogan

While the annual Spoleto Festival USA brings artists of international acclaim to the Lowcountry for 17 days, the city of Charleston's companion Piccolo Spoleto Festival is vital to the arts in its own special way: It highlights outstanding local and regional artists with a diverse lineup of music, theater, dance, literary and visual arts.

Director Scott Watson describes Piccolo Spoleto as a gathering where Charlestonians, along with their friends and neighbors, go out and support artists who are also friends and neighbors.

He said this year, the 45th year of Piccolo Spoleto, will "proudly celebrate what's made us special through those past decades and

also bring in some new twists."

Cornerstone programs like the Sundown Poetry series and the Charleston author series at Blue Bicycle Books will be accompanied by new programs, such as a one-night-only Gap Gallery show at Redux, an exhibition centered on Black mermaids and so much more.

There's also a wide range of music, dance and theater performances with acclaimed professionals and emerging artists, including K-12 students and art majors at the College of Charleston. Add in community-based events like outdoor concerts and marching band parades and even a sandcastle building contest. Result: There is truly something for everyone at this year's Piccolo Spoleto, May 26 to June 11.

Visual art events to enjoy all festival long

For the duration of the festival, Marion Square is transformed into an outdoor art market. More than 50 Charleston area artists will be on hand to sell work, answer questions and engage with the public under tents filled with paintings, photography, drawings and more. The **Outdoor Art Exhibition at Marion Square** is on view daily during the festival from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday through-Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday. Admission is free. Just around the corner at Wragg Square is the **Piccolo Spoleto Craft Show**. Expect high-quality original works created in a variety of craft media.

To see the work of talented young artists in grades four to 12, visit Upper Lance Hall at the Circular Congregational Church on Meeting Street. **The Art of Discovery**



Images provided

Works selected for the top places in the Piccolo Spoleto Juried Show will be on view at the Cannon Street Arts Center

exhibit will present student artwork that speaks to themes of mental health, self-discovery and the search for meaning. Open daily from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Free.

At the **City Gallery** at Waterfront Park, nationally recognized textile artist Torreah "Cookie" Washington of Charleston has curated an exhibition titled ***Celebrating Black Mermaids: From Africa to America***. The work of dozens of esteemed fiber artists from across the United States will be on view May 26 to July 9 with an opening reception 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. May 27. Watson said this show will explore a "fascinating cultural tradition expressed by contemporary textile artists."

Usually, the City Gallery hosts the Piccolo Spoleto Juried Show during the festival. This year was scheduled a bit differently, however, with the juried show closing on May 7. The works selected by juror Harriett Green for first, second and third places will be on view for the duration of the festival at the **Cannon Street Arts Center**. Those winning works are by artists Chris Bilton, based in Eutawville, South Carolina, Hirona Matsuda, a Charleston-based assemblage artist and Janet Swigler, a fiber artist from Columbia.

One night only: Gap Gallery and Redux

The pop-up **Gap Gallery**, led by Charleston-based artist and organizer Marie Carlados, will present an exhibition in partnership with the City Gallery and Redux Contemporary Art Center 5 p.m. to



Courtesy Charleston Symphony

Artistic Director Yuriy Bekker will lead the Charleston Symphony for the Sunset Serenade

8 p.m. May 26. The one-night-only event at Redux offers an opportunity for emerging artists to showcase their work while connecting with the vibrant visual arts community in Charleston.

“There seems to be a dynamic of artists who value the opportunity to have their work shown together but aren’t necessarily looking for a white cube gallery experience,” Watson said, adding that this event might attract a different crowd than, say, the outdoor art market at Marion Square. “And that’s something we’re trying to do, engage different audiences.”

Theater offerings around town

The **Threshold Repertory Theatre** will host five productions during Piccolo:

- *A Yank in Scotland*, the telling of one man’s story of loss and discovery
- *Cognac and Roses, A Toast to Edgar Allan Poe*, a program where Poe’s best and most loved works are told by six master storytellers
- *The Book of Will*, a play about Shakespeare and his friends
- *Booger Red*, a one-man show written and performed by Jim Loucks
- *UnShakeable*, an uplifting story of two actors with memory loss, presented in collaboration with the Charleston Opera Theater and the Charleston Symphony

Theater 99 hosts the “Piccolo Fringe Festival” and offers three chances to see its founding improv group The Have Nots plus three shows of Charleston’s original all-female improv comedy group Mary Kay Has a Posse. There’s also a one-woman show called *TOUCHED* by Jet Eveleth from *Animals* (HBO) and *AP Bio* (Peacock).

Concerts galore

And it wouldn’t be Piccolo Spoleto without music! Kicking off the festivities at 8 p.m. May 26 is the **Sunset Serenade with Charleston Symphony**, Piccolo Spoleto’s annual curtain raiser at the landmark U.S. Custom House. This free outdoor concert features the Charleston Symphony under the direction of Artistic Director Yuriy Bekker, plus local jazz musician Alva Anderson as a guest artist.

Piccolo is partnering with Lowcountry Voices to present at 5 p.m. May 27 the “**Black Broadway**” program at Charleston Music Hall. Lowcountry Voices is widely admired for its concerts of African-American spirituals and gospel music. Under the direction of Nathan L. Nelson, the musical revue will include music from *Porgy and Bess*, *The Color Purple*, *The Wiz*,



Provided

The Memorial Day Concert in Hampton Park is a festival tradition

The Lion King and more.

The **Young Artists Series** highlights the talents of the musical performance majors at the College of Charleston. Watson said the program emulates a balance of great local talent alongside visiting experts. Every evening during the festival, the Hill Gallery at Cato Center for the Arts will be filled with music ranging from classical to jazz.

A recital by the **Charleston Symphony Youth Orchestra** at the Charleston Music Hall will showcase nearly 100 musicians aged 9 to 18 from more than 20 schools throughout the Lowcountry. The program engages and inspires young musicians in a collaborative environment through mentorship from Charleston Symphony musicians. It’s free to attend the recital at 11 a.m. May 29.

Memorial Day celebrations

In celebration of Memorial Day, there are two chances to parade with the **Seed & Feed Marching Abominable**, a street band from Atlanta — the late night “pajama march” from 10:30 p.m. to midnight May 27 and the “patriotic parade” 11 a.m. to noon May 28.

On May 29, Hampton Park hosts the patriotic tradition of the festival’s **Memorial Day Concert**. This year features the combined Charleston Concert Band and Columbia Community Band in a concert ranging from rousing marches to Broadway show tunes, concluding with a stirring musical tribute to the armed forces. It kicks off at 3 p.m., and it’s recommended to bring chairs or blankets to enjoy the concert in the park.

Don’t miss out on this plethora of opportunities to celebrate what makes Charleston’s artistic community special. For events during the second half of the festival, check out our second special Piccolo Spoleto issue on June 2.

To see the full Piccolo schedule, visit PiccoloSpoleto.com.



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SOUTH CAROLINA SOCIETY HALL

November 5 at 3PM
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SOTTILE THEATRE

January 14 at 3PM
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DOCK STREET THEATRE

February 18 at 2 AND 4pm
SALON SERIES
SOUTH CAROLINA SOCIETY HALL

March 10 at 3PM
CHAMBER MUSIC WITH FRIENDS
SOTTILE THEATRE

March 24 at 3PM
OVATION CONCERT SERIES
DOCK STREET THEATRE

April 7 at 2 and 4pm
SALON SERIES
SOUTH CAROLINA SOCIETY HALL



Seed & Feed Marching Abominable

brings tradition,
family fun
to Charleston

By Timia Cobb

Some things are predictable when Seed & Feed comes to town. What started as a surprise performance during the '90s turned into more than a decade-old tradition of Atlanta's Seed & Feed Marching Abominable performing at Piccolo Spoleto. The marching band comes prepared every year with uplifting live music and quirky-bright costumes, bringing cheer and fun to the festival.

"You're always gonna see tutus. You're always gonna see glitter. You're always gonna see some hats or false eyelashes and lots, lots of shiny stuff," Seed & Feed Band manager Joann Cebulski said.

These are the main ingredients Cebulski, who's from Conyers, Georgia, described as the "visual extravaganza" awaiting three separate Piccolo Spoleto audiences this year. Seed & Feed will bring celebratory fun to the festival with more than 100 members in attendance. Its goal is to leave the audience with a sense of community by sticking to its mission: spreading joy through shock, awe and wonder.

The Seed & Feed Abominable will start

“

We have a saying, 'Once an Abominable, always an Abominable,' and it's true." —Karen Parker

Piccolo Spoleto's first weekend by playing in the Farmers Market parade at 11 a.m. on May 27, followed later that day with the Midnight Pajama March at the U.S. Customs House. The band will wrap up on Sunday at the Patriotic Concert.

What you'll hear

The band's music selection committee chooses a yearly roster of 40 to 50 songs to play throughout the season before its final gig that culminates at Piccolo Spoleto.

Drum major Karen Parker said the crowd should expect to hear anything from 1960s



and 1970s tunes to swing to rock to P!nk and the Black Eyed Peas.

"It's my favorite gig for the whole season," Parker said of Piccolo. "I've led the band once for the pajama march, and I'm very excited."

Parker is also the band's co-czar for Piccolo Spoleto along with her husband, Darrell Webb. Both have been Seed & Feed members for more than a decade and live in Lawrenceville, Georgia. As co-czars, they help organize and get the band to the festival.

Family and inclusivity are essential parts of Seed & Feed's framework. With members ranging in age from 14 to their mid-80s, the band accepts all talents, regardless of age and even location.

"We have a saying, 'Once an Abominable, always an Abominable,' and it's true," Parker said. "We usually have some out-of-town members join us for this. It's the end of our season, so it's a big celebration for us."

Last year was the first year of performing at Piccolo Spoleto for Atlanta residents Meghan McCloskey and her daughter Marissa Rainey. At 14, Rainey is the youngest musician in the band. Alongside the musicians, crowds will also see the band's non-musician traffic cops, called the Despicables, who also help keep the peace and make sure the band stays together in crowds. McCloskey acts as a Despicable alongside Cebulski, who is the band's Queen Despicable.

"It's just pure fun," McCloskey said. "When I'm driving home from a gig with my daughter, and we're both just kind of in that warmth of having a great time, and it is something that I get to do with my child, I just really can't beat that feeling."

For Rainey, Seed & Feed has become an outlet where she can express herself musically, and she says performing at events like Piccolo Spoleto makes her feel seen as a young musician.

"It's really great to be out somewhere and

have people telling you how special you are because you're able to provide that joy for music," Rainey said.

Whether they are dressed in tacky tourist costumes for the Family Day parade or red, white and blue for the patriotic concert, the Seed & Feed musicians say they are looking forward to putting smiles on Piccolo Spoleto listeners' faces.

"There's nothing like coming up those stairs and running out onto that big plaza and seeing all the people sitting on the steps waiting for you," Parker said. "It's a great thrill."

Cobb is a graduate student in the Goldring Arts Journalism and Communications Program at Syracuse University.



Photos by Caleb Barrett

The Seed & Feed Marching Abominable members will wear ... well, anything

CHARLESTON MUSICAL HERITAGE CONCERTS

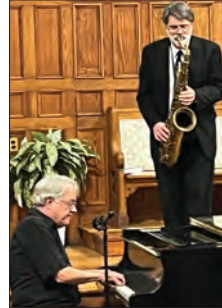
6 concerts spotlighting Charleston's musical history



The Sound of Charleston
From Gospel to Gershwin

MAY 27, 31, JUNE 3 & 10 AT 2PM

Charleston's longest running musical production featuring gospel, Gershwin, jazz, Civil War songs and light classics.



SUNDAY, MAY 28 AT 2PM

"Gershwin & Jazz" with Mayor John Tecklenburg, "Porgy and Bess" stars Diamond Tyler and Ramelle Brooks, and "Rhapsody in Blue"



SUNDAY, JUNE 4 AT 4PM

"Oh Happy Day" Gospel Music featuring the Bright Family Singers & Ensemble



with special guest, Ann Caldwell

Tickets available at Charleston Visitor Center. Adults \$28 Seniors \$26 (843) 270-4903 www.piccolospoleto.com

PICCOLO SPOLETO **CRAFT SHOW** WRAGG SQUARE 342 MEETING STREET

May 26 - 28 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
and June 2 - 4 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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Charleston's Piccolo Spoleto Festival is back with a broad range of performances — from free outdoor concerts, family-friendly fun and exhibitions to ticketed events to whet your cultural whistle in theater, music and more. Get out during the 17-day festival to experience the Holy City's creative community.

The calendar profiled in this publication focuses on the first half of the festival. To learn more and find tickets for some shows, visit PiccoloSpoleto.com.

FESTIVAL TRADITIONS

Sunset Serenade with Charleston Symphony

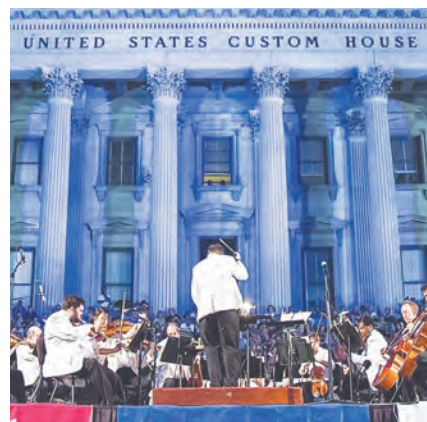
Piccolo Spoleto's annual curtain-raiser is a free, outdoor concert that features the Charleston Symphony under the direction of Artistic Director Yuriy Bekker.

UPDATED: 8 p.m., May 26. Charleston Music Hall. 37 John St. Free.

Seed & Feed Marching Abominable

Atlanta's wildest community band offers explosive sound at this annual festive concert.

11 a.m., May 27. Marion Square, King and Calhoun streets. Free.



File photo

Sunset Serenade with Charleston Symphony is a popular opening concert

Gullah/Geechee: Connecting with the Diaspora

The Gullah Geechee Angel Network presents this event that highlights artists, art and history connecting with the diaspora by way of Brazil. Honor, celebrate and sustain Gullah Geechee culture with education, food, dance, music and more.

Noon to 4 p.m., May 27. Cannon Street Arts Center, 134 Cannon St. Free.

Midnight Pajama March with the Seed & Feed Marching Abominable

You'll have more fun than you can imagine when watching this colorful and wild marching band from Atlanta. The all-volunteer group electrifies crowds. Free.

10:30 p.m. to midnight, May 27. U.S. Custom House, 200 East Bay St. Free.

Patriotic Parade with the Seed & Feed Marching Abominable

Daytime merriment, colorful street theater and explosive sound from this eclectic band.

11 a.m., May 28. U.S. Custom House, 200 East Bay St. Free.

Memorial Day Concert

This annual patriotic tradition features the combined Charleston Concert Band and Columbia Community Band in a concert ranging from rousing marches to Broadway show tunes. It concludes with



The L'Organo series celebrates Charleston's organs

Getty

a stirring musical tribute to each of the nation's armed forces.

3 p.m., May 29. Hampton Park, 30 Mary Murray Blvd. Free.

Piccolo on King block party

Music by Ziggymoto, street dining and food trucks, vendors, and family fun.

6 p.m. to 9 p.m., June 1. Free.

MUSIC

All shows are ticketed. (T)

Visit: PiccoloSpoleto.com.

Lowcountry Voices presents *Black Broadway*

Lowcountry Voices present a musical revue.

5 p.m. May 27, Charleston Music Hall, 37 John St. Free.

Early Music Series

A major part of Piccolo Spoleto since 1986, the Early Music Series by Chatham Baroque this year moves to St. Mary's Catholic Church, 89 Hasell St., Charleston. Bach, Vivaldi, and Mozart are the composers that will be featured in an intimate setting with stunning acoustics.

All concerts start at 3 p.m. and last an hour. (T)

May 28: Mediterranean Magic

May 29: Handel's Gloria

May 30: Vivaldi's Venice

May 31: Dances and Ayres from the British Isles

June 1: The Joy of Bach

June 2: The Art of the Trio

• Learn about June 4-9 shows at PiccoloSpoleto.com

Charleston Men's Chorus

Celebrate those who sacrificed for the nation in this Memorial Day concert.

Noon, May 29. St. Phillip's Church, 142 Church St. (T)

Charleston Musical Heritage Series

The Sound of Charleston, featuring music of Charleston's history, from gospel to Gershwin, is a festival favorite that this year offers more than ever. All shows at Circular Congregational Church, 150 Meeting St. (T)

The Sound of Charleston: 2 p.m., May 27; 2 p.m., May 31, June 3 and June 10.

Gershwin and Jazz with an All-Star

Cast: 2 p.m., May 28.

Oh Happy Day Gospel Music: 4 p.m., June 4.

New South Festival Singers

Formerly the William Baker Festival Singers, the group has performed at Piccolo Spoleto since 1989, bringing exciting a cappella classics and spirituals.

3 p.m., May 29. Circular Congregational Church, 150 Meeting St.

Piccolo Spoleto Rising Stars

Now in its 15th year, Palmetto State Arts Education will host its Rising Stars Series, which will showcase six young actors, dancers, musicians, writers or visual artists in each of six programs. All shows in the parish hall of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church Auditorium, 1 Vanderhorst St.

11 a.m. and 3 p.m., May 29.

11 a.m. and 3 p.m., June 3.

11 a.m. and 3 p.m., June 10.

Note

Schedule is subject to change, with additions and tweaks expected in the coming weeks. Be sure to check back with the *Charleston City Paper* and the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs for the latest up-to-date information.

This advance calendar listing focuses on the events in the first half of Piccolo Spoleto. Additional offerings will be highlighted in the second Piccolo Spoleto program guide to be published on June 2. The most up-to-date calendar information can always be found on piccolospoleto.com.

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Piccolo Picks

Piccolo Spoleto 2023 is back, stronger than ever. This year's annual event — the 45th so far — again will offer scores of fun, innovative programs and art experiences, according to Scott Watson, director of the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs.

The 17-day long arts party and companion to Spoleto Festival USA connects friends and neighbors to artists and friends across the Lowcountry. It's all about "what's made us special through those past decades and also brings in some new twists."

While this year's festival will again feature several last-minute neighborhood "pop-up events," here are five things you can count on to make memories that will last for years:



Provided

Lowcountry Voices presents *Black Broadway*

Free. 5 p.m. May 27, Charleston Music Hall, 37 John St.

Widely admired for concerts of African American spirituals and gospel music, Lowcountry Voices has turned its attention this year to another musical genre — Broadway. Since the mid-19th century, Broadway has increasingly felt the influence of Black music, composers and actors. Plays like *Porgy and Bess*, *The Color Purple*, *The Wiz* and *The Lion King* have become Broadway standards. Lowcountry Voices will present *Black Broadway*, a musical revue, under the direction of Nathan L. Nelson.



Provided

Early Music Series with Chatham Baroque

\$25.00. 3 p.m. May 28-31, June 1, 2, 4-9.

All concerts at St. Mary's Catholic Church, 89 Hassell St.

Compositions by Bach, Vivaldi and Mozart will be featured in 12 concerts, with Chatham Baroque headlining the first six. The stunning acoustics and intimate setting of Old St. Mary's make these hour-long concerts memorable. Tickets are available at CityPaperTickets.com.

Memorial Day Concert at Hampton Park

Free. 3 p.m., May 29, Hampton Park.

This annual patriotic tradition features the combined Charleston Concert Band and Columbia Community Band in a concert ranging from rousing marches to Broadway show tunes. It concludes with a stirring musical tribute to each of the nation's armed forces. Come salute our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who gave their lives to protect our freedom. Bring a chair or blanket to this free event.



(Detail) Madeline Dukes

45th Annual Piccolo Spoleto Outdoor Art Exhibition

Free. Marion Square.

Marion Square is transformed into a beautiful open-air market as 60 of the finest and most creative local artists exhibit and sell their work. You can view original oils, pastels, watercolors, acrylics, encaustics, photography and more.

May 26-June 10. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday-Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday.

Piccolo Spoleto Craft Show

Free. Wragg Square, 342 Meeting St.

The annual craft show will take place over two weekends. Baskets, centerpieces, jewelry, clothing and more will be on display and for sale from some of the most innovative and creative craft artists in and around Charleston. You'll find the perfect treat for yourself or a special gift for a friend or loved one in this diverse, exciting craft display.

10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on May 26 and May 27; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on May 28. On the second weekend, the show will have similar times.

Young Artists' Series at the College of Charleston

Accomplished music students and alumni perform at Hill Gallery at Cato Center for the Arts, 161 Calhoun St.

All concerts are at noon. (T)

May 29: Isn't It Romantic

May 30: Go for Baroque

May 31: CofC Jazz

June 1: Music of the Romantics

June 2: A Day with the Romantics

• Learn more at PiccoloSpoleto.com

Chamber Music Charleston

The group will celebrate women composers who were writing glorious music during the Baroque and early Classical eras. The show will feature music of Ana Bon, the Margrave of Brandenburg and his wife; and Anne Amalia.

6 p.m., May 31. S.C. Society Hall, 72 Meeting St.

L'ORGANO

Musicians will explore the range of pipe organs in nine churches throughout the Holy City in Piccolo Spoleto's annual L'Organo performances. Learn more about the music and locations online at PiccoloSpoleto.com. Free, but contributions welcome.

10 a.m., May 29: Raphael Vogl. Grace Church Cathedral, 98 Wentworth St.

10 a.m., May 30: Ryan Chan. St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, 405 King St.

10 a.m., May 31: Patrick Pope. Grace Church Cathedral, 98 Wentworth St.

10 a.m., June 1: Valentiona Huang. Cathedral Church of St. Luke and St. Paul, 126 Coming St.

10 a.m., June 2: Jared Lamenzo. French Huguenot Church, 136 Church St.

3 p.m., June 3: Mayor John Tecklenburg and Wesley Hall, Emanuel AME Church, 110 Calhoun St.

• View other shows online at PiccoloSpoleto.com

VISUAL ARTS

Art of Discovery: Young Artists

This exhibition showcases artists in grades 4 to 12.

May 26 to June 11. Circular Congregational Church, 150 Meeting St. Free.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Gap Gallery Pop-Up at Redux

In partnership with the City Gallery and Redux Studios, this one-night pop-up event offers an opportunity for emerging artists to show their work.

5 p.m. to 8 p.m., May 26.
Redux Contemporary Art Center,
1056 King St. Free.

Celebrating Black Mermaids: From Africa to America

Dozens of esteemed and award-winning fiber artists celebrate African goddesses as mermaid and water spirit in mixed-media work.

May 26 to July 9. City Gallery,
34 Prioleau St. Free.

PICCOLO FRINGE

Tickets online at PiccoloSpoleto.com.
All shows at 280 Meeting St.

The Have Nots! Comedy Improv Company offers powerful improvisational comedy in Charleston's longest running show. Shows on May 27, June 3 and June 10 at 8 p.m.

OTHER THEATRE 99 SHOWS

Take the Funny and Run

May 26, June 2, June 9. All shows at 8 p.m.

Mary Kay Has a Posse

7:30 p.m., June 1 and June 7;
and 6 p.m., June 3.



Ben Egelson

Mary Kay has a Posse celebrates 20 years of all-female improv comedy

Clean Improv Comedy Show

6 p.m., May 27.

Laughway to the Weekend

8 p.m., May 31.

THEATER

Tickets online at PiccoloSpoleto.com.

A Yank in Scotland

One man's story of loss (including a wallet) and discovery in the Highlands of Scotland.

4 p.m., May 27 and June 9. 3 p.m., June 3; 7 p.m. June 6. Threshold Repertory Theatre, 84½ Society St.

Cognac and Roses, A Toast to Edgar Allan Poe

Some of Poe's best and most loved works by six storytellers.

4 p.m., May 28. 7 p.m., May 28 and May 31. More shows June 3, 6 and 9. Threshold Repertory Theatre, 84½ Society St.

The Book of Will

This is a lively, funny and poignant love letter to theater and the words that fill it.

7 p.m. May 30 and June 1. More shows June 4, 5 and 7. Threshold Repertory Theatre, 84½ Society St.

Stelle di Domani at the College of Charleston

Stelle Di Domani is a broad, lively series by students, faculty and alumni of the College of Charleston of Charleston's award-winning Department of Theatre and Dance.

Five Women Wearing the Same Dress

6 p.m., May 26; 3 p.m., May 27; 6 p.m., May 28 and 29.
College of Charleston's Chapel Theatre, 172 Calhoun St.

V3: A Dance Installation

5:30 p.m., June 1; 11:30 a.m., June 2; 6:30 p.m., June 8. Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, 161 Calhoun St.



Tony Morgan/Coastal Cineworks

Annex Dance Company will premiere a dance film at Piccolo Spoleto

Staged Readings

4 p.m. daily starting May 30 through June 10, Calhoun St. Annex, 172 Calhoun St.

- View other shows online at PiccoloSpoleto.com

Booger Red

A one-man show written and performed by Jim Loucks.

7 p.m., June 2. Threshold Repertory Theatre, 84½ Society St.

- View later performances at PiccoloSpoleto.com.

DANCE

All shows are ticketed. (T)
Visit: PiccoloSpoleto.com.

Annex Dance Company

Enjoy a world premiere of the company's dance film created in April. It explores the push and pull of relationships in a series of vignettes.

6 p.m., May 31. Terrace Theatre, 1956D Maybank Highway.

CUR8 Charleston

Artists from across the state perform to a variety of music, from hip-hop to tap.

2 p.m. and 7 p.m., June 3.
West Ashley Theatre Center,
1401 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.

LITERARY AND IDEAS

Sundown Poetry Series

Piccolo Spoleto's annual Sundown Poetry Series features acclaimed poets who read from their work in Washington Square (Meeting Street and Broad Street). Bring your lawn chairs to this free event. Free.

Wilie Lee Kinard III: May 30
Marlanda Dekine: May 31
Eugene Platt: June 1
Angelo Geter: June 2.

- View later performances at PiccoloSpoleto.com.

Piccolo Fiction

This event devoted to fiction offers local and S.C. authors reading short stories. Authors include Brittany Butler, Gervais Hagerty, Y-Danair Niehrah and Sara Peck.
5 p.m. June 3, Blue Bicycle Books, 420 King St.

Piccolo Spoleto, the official outreach arm of Spoleto Festival USA, was founded by the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs in 1979. The 2023 Piccolo Spoleto Festival is funded in part by grants from the City of Charleston, and the South Carolina Arts Commission, which receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts. Patrons with accessibility concerns should call or email the Office of Cultural Affairs at (843) 724-7305 or email CulturalAffairs@charleston-sc.gov. The Office of Cultural Affairs is open Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. ©2023 City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs.

Black Mermaids exhibition offers 120 works to combat ‘Disney cutesieness’

By Natalie Rieth

Torrea “Cookie” Washington of Charleston deliberately set the opening of her latest fine art curation as a bit of clever counterprogramming.

The weekend of May 26 marks the opening of Disney’s live-action remake of *The Little Mermaid* but also — as a corrective to what she described as Disney’s “cutesiness” — it’s the opening of *Celebrating Black Mermaids: From Africa to America*, an exhibition of more than 120 mixed-media works.

As a celebrator of Black mermaid mythology and a mother and grandmother to girls, Washington says she isn’t fond of the fairy tale’s overarching message.

“Black mermaids are regarded as goddesses, and I don’t think any of them would give up being a goddess to get out of the water and marry a prince,” Washington said. “I’m hoping that African American little girls come away from the show with a sense of pride, rather than wanting to be Ariel.”

Ranging from photography to fiber art, the *Celebrating Black Mermaids* exhibit enlivens stories of African goddesses as mermaids and water spirits. On view at City Gallery at Waterfront Park until July 9, the exhibit will have its opening reception from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. May 27 at the gallery, preceding an ancestor blessing by Ashanti Kingdom High Chief Nathaniel B. Styles Jr. earlier in the day.

40 centuries of worship

Mermaid and water spirits have been worshiped for more than 4,000 years, predating the worship of Jesus Christ, Washington said. Over time, the half-human, half-

creature depiction of African water spirits combined with the European depiction of the half-human, half-fish we know today. *Celebrating Black Mermaids* delves into these millenia-old beliefs, which are passed on through oral traditions, and honors the significance of Black mermaids historically as well as in the belief systems of those forcibly removed from Africa.

“We have seen a large array of what European cultures deem is what a mermaid is, but all cultures have some form of water deity, and from those water deities, mermaids exist,” said Ohio artist Tony Williams. “It’s important that all those cultures be celebrated. It’s important to see the representation of oneself.”

Williams, internationally recognized for his indigo works, made three pieces for Washington’s show: “Mermaid Warrior,” a life-size quilt with cowry shell and iridescent fabric detailing; “Yemaya Black Mermaids,” a painting on dyed pulp paper; and “Olokun,” an articulated paper work that captures the swimming motion of the African deity. His work explores indigo, batik and African kola nut dying practices, all rooted in his own ancestral studies.

Michigan fiber artist Toya Thomas’s featured quilt, “Better Than Bondage,” conceptualizes a scene from the movie *Amistad* of a mother throwing herself and her child overboard. Having experienced the pains of enslavement overseas, many forcibly removed Africans chose to end their lives to escape, she said. Thomas’s quilt retells this story by adding a mermaid who receives them and carries them to a better place. As a tribute to the journey of her ancestor Thomas from Africa to America, she crafted the mermaid in her own likeness.

“I hope that people come away with an appreciation of the art, but also become more knowledgeable of the stories that each piece has to tell,” Thomas said.

California-based textile and installation artist Patricia Montgomery’s mermaid doll Alabaster portrays the mysterious African



“Oya” (above) by Ashley Brown is just one of more than 100 works of art in *Celebrating Black Mermaids*

water goddess Mami Wata, whose powers were known to grant wealth, power and fertility. Before ritual dances were outlawed in America, enslaved Africans worshiped Mami Wata by playing music and dancing into a trance-like state.

“She’s the doll that can dance with us today,” Montgomery said, “allowing us to have that same feeling of being connected to something bigger than ourselves.” The doll’s body is fabricated with batik fabric that Montgomery said embodies Alabaster with rhythm and movement, and is embellished with alabaster and cowry shells, beads and crystals.

Washington said the show, which includes more than 80 artists, will be even bigger than a Black mermaids exhibit she mounted in 2012, also at City Gallery.

“In history books we are not talking about Black women,” Washington said. “And I want Black women and girls to know that the story of Black women doesn’t start on a plantation somewhere in the South. We are not coming up from slavery. We are descended from being worshiped as goddesses and queens.”

Natalie Rieth is an arts journalism master’s degree student at Syracuse University.



Images provided

Internationally recognized artist Tony Williams made three pieces for the show, including “Yemaya Black Mermaids”

Gatsby Orchestra

celebrates 100 years of 'The Charleston'

By Joyelle Ronan

When Charleston's Gatsby Orchestra plays "The Charleston" during Piccolo Spoleto, don't expect the tinny-sounding, scratchy-needle-on-a-Victrola 1920s jazz you hear in the movies or on TV. The music played live is full and luscious — just as it was in Jay Gatsby's day in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. It has been 100 years since the birth of "The Charleston," an internationally known song/dance combo that shares a deep history with its namesake city.

Charleston-area residents William "Bill" McSweeney and Jack Pettit founded the Gatsby Orchestra in 2019 and still serve as band leaders. The pair met 20 years ago while playing in a Charleston Stage production and bonded over a shared love of jazz, especially from the 1920s. The orchestra also benefits from McSweeney's extensive jazz knowledge: The 66-year-old taught history at the College of Charleston for 25 years and grew up listening to and playing music from the period.

"Bill is a unique component of the Gatsby Orchestra," said Pettit, 52, who plays tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone and clarinet. "He is a living connection to that era, and bringing that authenticity to the music."

According to McSweeney, the originator of "The Charleston" song was James P. Johnson, a Black songwriter from New York who wrote music for Broadway. Johnson visited to Charleston and played with musicians like Duke Ellington and Count Basie at the Jenkins Orphanage, known as "The Cradle of Jazz." He took the Charleston sound, which likely came from Black dock workers, and took it back to New York, which led to dances created from similar music. In 1923, Johnson wrote the Broadway hit "Runnin' Wild," which featured "The Charleston."



Photos provided

The Gatsby Orchestra was founded in 2019 by William McSweeney and Jack Pettit



"It crossed cultural barriers," said McSweeney, who serves as the orchestra's emcee, singer and trombonist. "Everybody who danced to anything in the Roaring '20s danced to 'The Charleston.'"

Acting as "musical archaeologists," McSweeney said he and Pettit dig up the past to find what was important to that era and try to recreate it in a way that's faithful and true. The Gatsby Orchestra is a standard 1920s-style ensemble featuring three saxophones, two trumpets, a violin, a trombone, a tuba, a banjo, a piano, a drum set and a bandleader. Its music is a cross between traditional jazz and World War II-era New Orleans swing music.

The orchestra's motto is "where you take center stage" because it considers audience participation to be a central element to its music. People are encouraged to dress up in clothing from that era and learn how to dance "The Charleston" from choreographer Stephan Duane.

"Music brings people from all backgrounds together," said Pettit, who was a music major at the University of South Carolina and is now a music teacher for the Charleston County School District. "If there's one thing in Charleston's history that seems to have brought people together, it's the song and dance 'The Charleston.'"

There can be many different styles of the basic steps for the song, depending on variants like twists, kicks and energy. People may be reluctant to hit the dance floor at

"Gatsby Orchestra loves being involved with every event that takes place around Charleston. We feel as though we're just Charleston ambassadors."

—William McSweeney

first, Duane said, but they tend to loosen up, goof off and have fun once the line dance starts. "It's such a freeform authentic jazz that really anything goes," he said.

While McSweeney and Pettit have played past Piccolo Spoleto festivals in other bands, this year marks the Gatsby Orchestra's Piccolo debut. It will be at the opening ceremony at City Hall on May 26, with another performance occurring at a later date in June.

"Gatsby Orchestra loves being involved with every event that takes place around Charleston," McSweeney said. "We feel as though we're just Charleston ambassadors."

Joyelle Ronan is an arts journalism graduate student at Syracuse University.

For tickets and the daily calendar visit **PiccoloSpoleto.com**



Grab a copy of our next guide coming June 2 in the *Charleston City Paper*

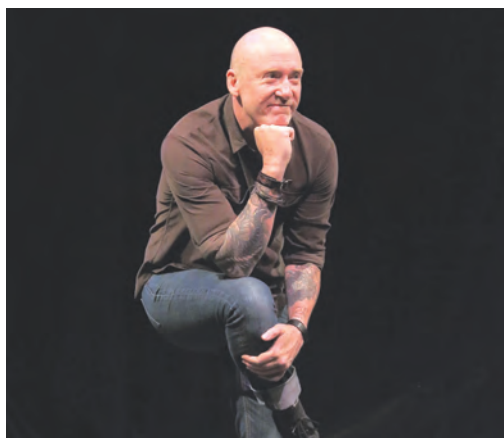


MORE PICCOLO EVENTS

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**LOVE IS IN THE AIR
WITH THE CHARLESTONES**
Friday, June 2 at 7 p.m.
at Cannon Street Arts Center



BOOGER RED
Friday, June 2 at 7 p.m.
Saturday, June 3 at 6 p.m.
Sunday, June 4 at 7 p.m.
Threshold Repertory Theatre



THE SOUND OF CHARLESTON
Saturday, Jun 3 at 2 p.m.
Saturday, Jun 10 at 2 p.m.
at Circular Congregational Church



**CHAMBER MUSIC
FEATURING JEWISH
COMPOSERS WITH YURIY
BEKKER AND FRIENDS**
Sunday, June 4 at 6 p.m.
at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim



**EARLY MUSIC SERIES
BACH CELLO SUITES**
Wednesday, June 7 at 3 p.m.
at St. Mary's Catholic Church



**CAPTURING THE AMERICAN
SPIRIT: MUSIC OF DVORAK,
PRICE, BURLEIGH,
AND STILL**
Wednesday, June 7 at 6 p.m.
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