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By David Lyman ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT SPRING 2021 MARCH 11, 2021

## 2021 Spring Arts Preview



A rehearsal for the Know Theatre’s multimedia production of Theatre: a love story. The production takes place in many locations around the city. This one is in the Imperial Theatre in the Mohawk section of Over-the-Rhine. Cast members are, from left, AJ Baldwin, Montez O. Jenkins-Copeland, Elizabeth Molloy and Nathan Tubbs.

### It may take a little work on your part, but you can still enjoy the arts during the pandemic

A story about Spring Arts?

When my editor asked me to write about what was going to be happening in the arts over the course of the next few months, I was slightly flabbergasted.

It’s not that I hadn’t written articles like this in the past. But this spring—indeed, the past year—is not like the past. If there is anything arts lovers have learned during the course of the past 12 months, it’s how not to look ahead. We learned that no matter how much our favorite organizations planned, the weeks and months ahead could—and probably would—look entirely different.

To participate in “the arts” meant you had to do one of three things:

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- You could stream a movie or TV show.
- You could watch one of the streaming projects being created by arts organization, both local and global.
- You could take a walk and enjoy some of Greater Cincinnati's abundant collection of public art.

There were a few outliers. Cincinnati's largest museums began to open to limited numbers of in-person visitors during the summer of 2020. Cincinnati Shakespeare Company was able to perform a truncated version of its summer performances in area parks. Cincinnati Ballet gave a weekend of performances to a socially distanced audience on the Ohio River waterfront. Later, they pulled off another one in the Music Hall Ballroom.

But this was most definitely not a return to "normalcy."

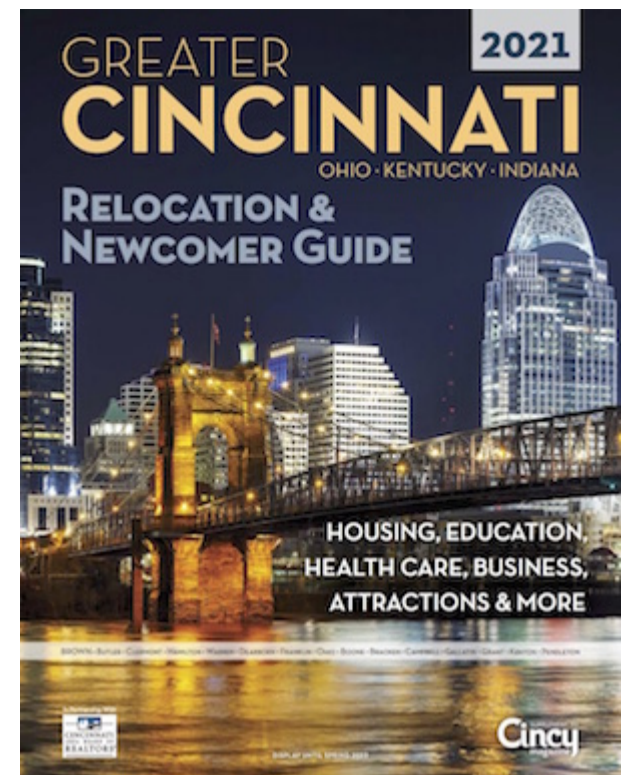
So, now to the spring of 2021. Barring a huge uptick in the number of new coronavirus cases, there are some exhibitions and performances that you should be able to count on. But life—especially for the arts—remains iffy. Charting a path through the "Spring Arts Season" may call for some enterprise on your part.

Let's start with a few of the sure things.

Taft Museum ([taftmuseum.org](http://taftmuseum.org)) is hosting more than 100 pairs of historic shoes from the Stuart Weitzman Collection. A few are designed by Weitzman. But this is an expansive show, with everything from Madonna's sandals and over-the-top pumps from the 1920s to elegantly embroidered 19th Century French slippers. The show is called "Walk This Way" and will be at the Taft through June 6.



Broadway costume designer Gregg Barnes created these dazzling thigh-high stilettos for the Broadway production of Kinky Boots. They are part of the "Walk This Way" exhibition at the Taft Museum through June 6.



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Know Theatre ([knowtheatre.com](http://knowtheatre.com)) has been very active during the pandemic. Several of their online-only shows are archived on the website. But right now, they are offering an especially adventurous show called Theatre: a love story. Unlike many theaters' presentations, this one was recorded at multiple locations; the Imperial Theatre in Mohawk, an old church, a greenhouse and various locations around Over-the-Rhine. With a trio of directors and one choreographer, it is described as a mix of film, digital effects, live performance, acting and dance.

After taking a hiatus from live performances, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra ([cincinnati-symphony.org](http://cincinnati-symphony.org)) and Cincinnati Pops came roaring back in late January with an ambitious schedule of concerts running all the way to mid-May. Some are online-only. But most of are what the CSO calls "rescaled in-person concerts." That means that socially distanced seating will permit a modest-sized audience in Music Hall's Spring Auditorium. Subscribers have first dibs on the tickets. But there have been tickets available to the general public for almost every performance so far.

After online-only performances of its Kaplan New Works Series running through March 7, Cincinnati Ballet returns to the great outdoors May 21-23 for Ballet in the Park. This time, though, the company will perform at Eden Park's Seabrook Pavilion, where the company performed more than 40 years ago. You'll need tickets, but the performance is free—or pay what you want.



Though this is actually a photo of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra rehearsing last summer, it gives you a rough idea of the socially distanced seating arrangement that the group uses to make in-person performances possible at Music Hall. Currently, just 300 audience members are permitted in the hall. But, as state and federal coronavirus-response guidelines change, that number may grow.

Next door at the Cincinnati Art Museum, you still have time to catch a marvelous show about Frank Duveneck, whom many regard as Cincinnati's most influential painter. CAM has many of Duveneck's works in its own collection. But it has gathered together many more to present what they are billing as "the first comprehensive exhibition in more than 30 years." The show runs through March 28. And while you're there, you really should pop in and see Anila Quayyum Agha's "All the Flowers Are for Me." Using little more than a single light source shining from inside a large, suspended cube with a fine filigree of patterns cut into it, she creates an installation that is mesmerizing.

As the weather gets warmer, keep your eyes open for events that will pop up outside.



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Here is another thought. If you're game for doing a little exploration on your own, search around online to find projects involving local artists who are experimenting with projects that are a little off the beaten path.

So that might be the Cincinnati Black Theatre Artist Collective, which came into existence in the wake of last summer's Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Or Revolution Dance Theatre, too. Or Falcon Theatre's production of The Agitators, which runs online March 12-20.

Actor Darnell Pierre Benjamin, who could regularly be seen in a number of local theaters before the pandemic, has found an additional gig as a TV host. The show is called Long Story Short and it debuts at 9 p.m. April 2 on CET and ThinkTV.

There are dozens of such side-adventures out there. One I was particularly fond of was the Playhouse in the Park's Pod Plays. They've been bouncing around since last summer. The idea is that two playwrights—Trey Tatum and Isaiah Mikel-Reaves—were commissioned to write plays that unfolded in some Greater Cincinnati locale. Tatum chose Alms Park in Columbia-Tusculum, while Reaves chose the area on and around the Purple People Bridge.

Both two-character plays are available free online. You can listen to them in your car or sitting in front of your computer. But if you want the full experience, go to the places where the plays take place and, following the directions in the play, experience the plays in the locations where they are best experienced.

The Playhouse's Pod Plays are really quite lovely. And without the pandemic, it's unlikely that the Playhouse or the writers would have embarked on such a venture. Maybe we'll see more of them. Maybe not. But in the meantime, they offer us an imaginative respite from the ho-hum that has been foisted upon us.

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