

# COMING ATTRACTIONS!

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## LIVE ENTERTAINMENT IS BACK

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By Janet Mandelstam







1. A dance performance during "Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought," choreographed by Selene Carter, for IU Theatre's *Shifting Landscapes: the 2020 Winter Dance Concert*. Photo by Jeremy Hogan 2. Bloomington Chamber Singers. Courtesy photo 3. (l-r) Julie Dixon as Ella and Ken Farrell as God in the Jewish Theatre of Bloomington production of *Oh God*. Photo by Chris Fichtner 4. The Dynamics perform a concert in May 2019 at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. Photo by Rodney Margison

## Hallelujah! After 18 months of shuttered theaters and darkened music halls, live performances are back.

While most of our local performing groups and venues continued to entertain via the internet during the height of the pandemic—some in extraordinarily creative ways—nothing can compare to live theater, live dance, and live music.

Though we are sadly not through with this scourge, vaccines and testing have made it possible to attend entertainment venues. Many of those, if not all, are insisting that patrons show proof of COVID-19 vaccination or a recent COVID test result. As they should.

What's in store in the months ahead? Here are the coming attractions.

—the editor

# CARDINAL STAGE



Mike Price as Captain Hook in Cardinal Stage's 2017 production of *Peter Pan*. Photo by Blueline

Cardinal Stage is offering a new "p[l]ay what you will" ticket option this season. One month before the start of each production, theatergoers can choose the price they want to pay for a ticket. "We want to give everyone the opportunity to see our performances," Gloden says. "We hope this helps us generate a wider audience."

While pleased to return to live performances, Gloden says the company was able to keep the majority of its regular staff employed throughout the pandemic. "We made a decision to put together a season without indoor, in-person activities," he says. "It was a season of artistic adventure." The most successful adventures were the Walkabout Radio Plays. Armed with a smart phone and headphones, Bloomingtonians could listen to the plays while standing in the spot where the action takes place. It was, Gloden says, "theater on demand."

Productions originally planned for 2020 and 2021 will make up Cardinal Stage's schedule this season.

When the company returns to live performances at the John Waldron Arts Center on February 17, it will present *The Mountain Top*, a play by Katori Hall that portrays Martin Luther King Jr.'s last night before his assassination.

"It's a conversation between King and a maid who visits him at the motel," says Gabe Gloden, Cardinal's managing director. The play, he says, "is part of our equity and inclusion initiative. Last year was a wake-up call for the theater community to reflect the diversity of our community on our stage."

*Mountain Top* will be followed by *Ada and the Engine* beginning March 31. It's the story of Ada Lovelace, a mathematician who is now recognized as the first computer programmer. The season ends next June with the award-winning rock musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, which will be presented during Pride month to celebrate the show's LGBTQ+ themes and characters.

"We've wanted to do *Hedwig* for many years," Gloden says. "*Ada* and *Hedwig* were going to close out the 2020 season. *Mountain Top* was scheduled for 2020–21."

Cardinal Stage kicked off its 15th anniversary season in September with outdoor performances of *Every Brilliant Thing* at the McCormick's Creek Amphitheater.

The popular family holiday musical *A Year with Frog and Toad* will be produced for the fourth time in December. The play about friendship and acceptance, first performed 15 years ago, will be staged at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater.

Visit [cardinalstage.org](http://cardinalstage.org)

# BUSKIRK-CHUMLEY THEATER



Local blues band King Bee and the Stingers performing at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater in May 2019. Photo by Rodney Margison

The Buskirk-Chumley Theater (BCT) stage was dark for more than a year, but it's brightly lit now. "We're just happy to be able to come together as a community for music," says Jonah Crismore, the theater's executive director.

BCT's live season opened September 2 with the Limestone Comedy Festival and offers an eclectic schedule of music, comedy, and drama.

"So many bands that have performed here before are coming back," says Crismore. That includes fan favorites The Jacob Jolliff Band—which Crismore calls "a bluegrass super group"—on October 13, and husband and wife duo Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn, who bring their Appalachia-influenced sound to the theater on October 29.

Other musical performers include singer-songwriter Aoife O'Donovan on October 20, Gin Blossoms on November 2, The Weight Band on November 11, Iron & Wine on November 19, and Andy McKee on December 1.

The last concert currently scheduled is an acoustic holiday show with Carrie Newcomer and Over the Rhine, a folk music duo, on December 11. "We're assessing what the world looks like before announcing any other shows," Crismore says.

On the comedy front, the Buskirk-Chumley presented a performance by Kevin James Thornton, a TikTok star with nearly 1 million fans. "We were particularly excited to present Kevin, whose

videos are about his life growing up in a small town in Indiana," Crismore says.

On October 22, theatergoers will be entertained by Nurse Blake, a performer who uses his time in nursing school and at patients' bedsides to celebrate—with humor—the hard work of health care providers.

Throughout the season, the Buskirk-Chumley hosts performances by many Bloomington arts organizations including the Bloomington Chamber Singers and the Lotus Education & Arts Foundation. The Latin Jazz Ensemble from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music will perform on October 11.

During the year without in-person shows, "we were still able to present a few [livestreamed] events," Crismore says. "We ran a film series last summer and a Beethoven's Birthday Bash with the Bloomington Symphony."

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Visit **[buskirkchumley.org](http://buskirkchumley.org)**

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# BLOOMINGTON CHAMBER SINGERS

Few activities have been as curtailed during the pandemic as choral singing. But that hasn't stopped the Bloomington Chamber Singers from being active or from planning their 52nd season.

The 45-voice chorus will open the season with two live performances of *Considering Matthew Shepard* on October 9 and 10 at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater.

Matthew Shepard was a gay American student who was beaten, tortured, and left to die near Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998. "That was a pivotal moment in U.S. history," says Gerry Sousa, director of the Chamber Singers. The theme of the work, written in 2016 by Craig Johnson, "is that we need compassion for each other regardless of race, religion, or sexual orientation," Sousa says. "I was drawn to it by its mission and its music."

Sousa says the oratorio "combines many musical forms and will be semi-staged with projections and lighting designers from Indiana University Theatre." It will be livestreamed as well.

Later in the season the singers will perform *St. Nicolas*, a cantata by Benjamin Britten, on December 5 at St. Mark's United Methodist Church, and present a concert that includes Mozart's *Great Mass* and selections by Vaughan Williams and Brahms in the spring.

The free, annual singalong of Handel's *Messiah* will be offered in two parts on December 12, including the "Hallelujah" chorus. "We invite all to come and sing," says Sousa.

"The chorus stayed pretty much intact over the past year with rehearsals held online," Sousa adds. The singers have been active during the pandemic, too. Accompanied by piano and cello, with Sousa conducting and each member singing from home, they produced a virtual choir project, *O Love*, by American composer Elaine Hagenberg. And with local musicians they offered *Songs of Comfort and Joy*, free holiday music recordings and videos. Both performances are still available on the chorus' website.



Bloomington Chamber Singers will perform *Considering Matthew Shepard* on October 9–10. Courtesy photo

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# JEWISH THEATRE OF BLOOMINGTON



(l-r) Jonathan Golembiecki and Christopher Plonka in the Jewish Theatre of Bloomington's 2019 production of *Cherry Docs*. Photo by Chris Fichtner

Changes are afoot at the Jewish Theatre of Bloomington. A new managing director, Amalia Shiffriss, arrived in July as producing artistic director Audrey Heller announced plans to retire in the next few years.

Shiffriss, a Bloomington native, has been involved in theater since childhood. Heller co-founded the theater 16 years ago and has been its driving force ever since. Both are shaping the upcoming season.

The season opens with *Mr. Halpern and Mr. Johnson* during the first two weeks of October. The play will be shown via Zoom. "We're not going live until the spring," says Shiffriss. "We wish it could be sooner."

The two-character play begins in a cemetery where Mr. Halpern, an elderly Jewish widower, is mourning the loss of his wife, Florence. He is surprised by the arrival of Mr. Johnson, who reveals a long, close friendship with Florence. "There is pain and anger as the two men get to know each other," Shiffriss says.

Performing on Zoom will be familiar for the company. "We did four live new Zoom shows during the pandemic," she says. "We had viewers from seven states and five countries."

The company returns to in-person theater in May with a performance of *The Wanderers* at the John Waldron Arts Center. The play, Shiffriss says, "was put off twice." It is the story of two

couples: Orthodox Jews who are embarking on an arranged marriage, and high-profile celebrities who, despite being married to other people, begin a flirtatious correspondence. On the surface the couples seem to have little in common, but the play explores their hidden connections.

Both plays evoke the Jewish Theatre's mission to illuminate Jewish experience while touching on universal human themes.

That's been the mission since Heller co-founded the theater in 2005. She has worked full time as an unpaid volunteer ever since. With her retirement on the horizon, the theater has launched a fundraiser to financially support her successor and ensure the long-term future of the company.

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## BLOOMINGTON BLUES & BOOGIE WOOGIE PIANO FESTIVAL

The piano has been silent for the past two seasons as the pandemic has forced the cancellation of the Bloomington Blues & Boogie Woogie Piano Festival.

Since 2015, the festival has brought leading blues, boogie-woogie, gospel, and stride pianists; Zydeco accordionists; percussionists; and professional dancers to Bloomington for a rollicking weekend of music in August.

The 2020 festival was ready to roll when COVID-19 brought everything to a halt. "All the musicians scheduled to play in 2020 will be the first to be brought back," says festival founder Craig Brenner. Those performers include pianists Bob Seeley, Judy Carmichael, and Daryl Davis, along with accordionist C.J. Chenier.

When the music returns, so will the educational activities that have been integral to the festival since its inception. Festival musicians have offered concerts at Fairview and Templeton elementary schools and at Tri-North Middle School, as well as free workshops and lessons. Students at those schools receive free tickets to the public performances.

Also on hold is a planned documentary about the festival that WTIU-TV hoped to film in 2020. "We believe they are still interested," says Brenner.

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Legendary boogie-woogie pianist Bob Seeley will be among the first musicians brought back when the festival returns next year. Courtesy photo

# BLOOMINGTON PLAYWRIGHTS PROJECT



(l-r) Nate Curlott and Emily Radke in BPP's 2015 production of *The Bull, The Moon, & The Coronet of Stars*. Photo by Matthew Levandoski

When the next Bloomington Playwrights Project (BPP) show goes live on December 8, the audience will be more than a collection of passive attendees. *Just Between the All of Us*, the season opener, is a choose-your-own-adventure musical in which every decision that Madeline, the lead character, makes is determined by audience vote. “What the audience picks will change what happens,” says BPP Managing Director Brad Schiesser. “You can see a different show every night.”

Bloomington Playwrights Project, the only theater in Indiana to focus solely on new plays, has presented more than 500 plays and musicals since its founding in 1979. “We exist to further along the western cannon of theater by supporting the writers of new work,” says Schiesser. The upcoming season continues that tradition.

*Modern*, a musical about a group of Amish teenagers who face a choice—be baptized in the church or leave their community—debuts on February 4. “The production,” Schiesser says, “is almost like a co-production with [Indiana University] Theatre and Drama. IU students will be doing the work backstage.”

The company faces what he calls “an interesting technical challenge” in March when it presents *Heist*, a thriller that includes an actual heist on stage. “We’re attempting to do something I’ve never seen before.”

The May offering is *Tell Me I’m Not Crazy*. Forced into retirement and unsettled by the changing world, Sol Koenig buys a gun. The play asks how one small firearm redefines a family and how the generations confront what it means to succeed and to sacrifice in today’s America.

A play from the past, *Still the River Runs*, closes out the season next June. The two-character show “was one of our most successful plays from years ago,” says Schiesser.

The live performances follow last season’s virtual performances on Zoom. “People in 37 states were watching,” he says. As successful as that season was, Schiesser says, “We’re just excited to be doing live theater again.”

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## IU THEATRE

Indiana University’s Department of Theatre, Drama, and Contemporary Dance will offer a 2021–2022 season of five theatrical productions and two dance programs.

“The theater season is a nice mix of existing works and new plays,” says Madison Colquette, the department dramaturg.

Mack the Knife takes the stage in *The Threepenny Opera*, the Brecht-Weill “play with music,” on October 28–30 in a new translation from Britain’s National Theatre.

That’s followed on November 18–20 by the contemporary work *Jump*, which Colquette describes as “a gorgeous play about how we hold memory and grief.”

IU Theatre then dips into history to present *Sueño*, an adaptation of a play from the golden age of Spanish theater, on February 10–12. The play is set in 1635. “It offers a great opportunity for costume and scenic design, which is all done by students and faculty,” says Colquette.

Now in its 10th year, the At First Sight festival will feature staged readings of two new plays by M.F.A. playwrights Jayne Deely and Annalise Cain. The festival runs for three weekends in March.

The theater season concludes April 13–16 with *Carrie: The Musical*, based on the book by Stephen King. “It’s really fun—a killer musical,” Colquette says.

The season opened in September with *The Well of Horniness*, a campy whodunit.

Interspersed between plays are the dance programs. The winter program, *Earthward*, explores the relationships between bodies and the earth. It is choreographed by the dance faculty and will be performed December 10–11 by faculty, students, and guest artists. The spring program, *New Moves/New Directions*, will be presented by IU Contemporary Dance on April 28–29. “All the pieces are choreographed by students in the class of 2022 as part of their senior projects,” Colquette says.

The department did have a season last year, but all performances were virtual, she explained. “We’re excited to transition to performing live this year.”



A December 2019 performance of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* by IU Theatre. Photo by Jeremy Hogan

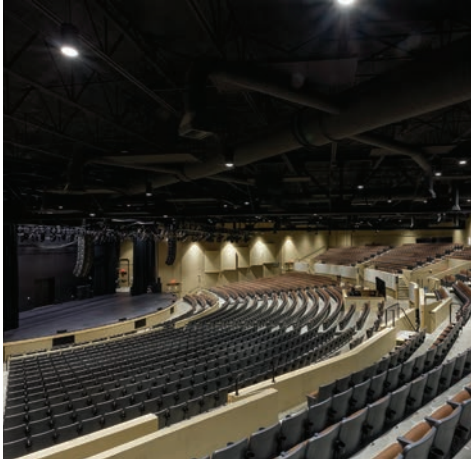
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# BROWN COUNTY MUSIC CENTER



The seats at Brown County Music Center will soon be full again when live performances return to the 2,017-seat auditorium. Courtesy photo

When COVID-19 forced the Brown County Music Center to shut down, the venue had only been open for 197 days. “We were closed for three times as long as we were open,” says Executive Director Christian Webb.

Now with a full slate of concerts scheduled this fall, Webb says, “We’re excited for the future. We have over 30 events planned for the rest of 2021, and we’ll be experimenting with different genres of music.”

Among the highlights on the calendar are Christopher Cross’ 40th anniversary tour on October 13 and an appearance by Brian Wilson, co-founder of The Beach Boys, on October 22. Other familiar names on the marquee include Melissa Etheridge, Three Dog Night, and Kenny G.

Webb says that “three icons of music” will appear together on November 7 when Grammy winners Mary Chapin Carpenter, Marc Cohn, and Shawn Colvin take the stage. They will be followed on November 11 by fan favorite John Hiatt and the Jerry Douglas Band.

Sandwiched between musical acts on October 16-17 is *Broadway Fright Night*, which Webb describes as “horror snippets from Broadway, like *Phantom of the Opera*.” *Fright Night* will be a benefit for Thrive Alliance of Columbus, Indiana.

And on December 11, the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra will celebrate the holidays.

Already on the books for next spring is an April concert by Willie Nelson and Family.

And Gallery 200 is back in the inner lobby, displaying work by Brown County artists as part of the center’s community-focused mission.

The Brown County Music Center opened in 2019 to a sold-out show by Vince Gill. “Some 5,000 people walked through the doors before we had to shut down,” Webb says. But the center’s doors weren’t completely shuttered by COVID-19. Doing what Webb calls “our pandemic pivot,” the center hosted a coronavirus testing and vaccination site in its lobby area and a municipal court on the stage. “Doing business with the judicial department and the health department kept the center afloat.”

Now, Webb says, “We’re just excited that the venue is open for music again.”

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Visit [browncountymusiccenter.com](https://www.browncountymusiccenter.com)

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The 2018 Cardinal for Kids production of *Robin Hood*. Photo by Blueline