

## ARTS COMMENTARY

# The Best of the upcoming Phil season

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Every year, receiving the Philharmonic Center for the Arts's new catalog is cause for celebration. The anticipation builds, and then, finally, one day, there it is in my mailbox. Turning the glossy, full-color pages is like slowly unwrapping gifts, one at a time, the pages full of the promise of cultural satisfaction ahead.

And, for those of us who cover arts and entertainment for a living, it also gives us a good idea of what our upcoming year is going to be like.

The Phil just seems to offer more and more every year.

This year, their lifelong learning workshops and seminars were so numerous (almost 150 adult education classes) that the Phil had to put them in a separate booklet, "You're Never Too Old (Or Young) To Learn."

Here's my highly subjective look at the upcoming season at the Phil: my personal favorites, and what I suspect will be highlights of the season.

**Liza Minnelli** performs on Tuesday, Feb. 24. I saw her last year at the Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall in Fort Myers, and I was just blown away. I had never attended a concert of hers, and wasn't sure what to expect, whether she'd be at the top of her game.

She is. Especially of note is the section of her show devoted to the Kay Thompson songbook, complete with old-school choreography with handsome backup singers/dancers. A performer of the old school, she gives her all, and she entertains. It's impossible not to fall in love with her.

When she walked on stage my theater companion murmured, "Oh, she's just a little thing." At the end of her performance, he declared, "When she sings, she's 7 feet tall!"

**Phoebe Snow** performs Thursday, Dec. 11. Most people know her for "Poetry Man," but she's so much more. She's sultry, she's soulful, she's funky. She can sing a seductive "Teach Me Tonight," growl her way through "Shakey Ground" and put her distinctive spin on the Beatles' "Don't Let Me Down" and Paul McCartney's "Every Night."

When I saw her perform in Naples a number of years ago, she did a take-

no-prisoners cover of "Rockin' Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu," wearing an audience member's tie and jumping up and down during the chorus for emphasis.

**The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis** plays the Phil on Sunday, Jan. 25. For those of us who find smooth jazz or snooze jazz too weak and predictable, this is the real thing. Mr. Marsalis, winner of nine Grammy Awards, is the first jazz artist to have ever received a Pulitzer Prize.

The man is so talented that whether he's playing his trumpet or just talking in-between tunes, you get a good education. He truly believes, as the subtitle of his new book claims, that jazz can change your life. It's good to see him returning to the Phil.

The Phil is pretty much the only place locally where you can see top-class modern dance (while also, incidentally, hearing some of the most progressive music.) This season, in its 50th anniversary celebration, the **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre** performs on Tuesday, April 14. Momix brings its acrobatic dance to the center on Tuesday, Jan. 27, and **Hubbard Street Dance Chicago**, a personal favorite of mine for its innovation and creativity, returns Thursday, Feb. 19.

Last season, when Hubbard Street Dance Chicago performed at the Phil, it show was preceded by a half-hour-long "snowstorm" of feathers onstage. Then, when the program began, the dancers performed among the feathers.

On Wednesday, Feb. 25, "**Defying Gravity: the Music of Stephen Schwartz**" features Liz Callaway, Scott Coulter and Debbie Gravitte joining the Academy-Award winning composer and singing his songs. Mr. Schwartz composed Broadway musicals such as "Wicked," "Godspell" and "Pippin" and animated



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Linda Eder ~ March 22



Dame Edna ~ April 10



Hal Holbrook in "Mark Twain Tonight" ~ April 9



Hubbard Street Dance Chicago ~ Feb. 19



Hot Club of San Francisco ~ Feb. 20 and 21

films such as "Pocahontas," "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" and "the Prince of Egypt."

**Linda Eder** returns to the Phil on Sunday, March 22. The Broadway star of "Jekyll & Hyde" can sing anything: standards, pop songs, Broadway classics. She is, quite simply, phenomenal. Every time I hear her perform, she knocks me out. And she's the antithesis of a diva — just so unassuming on stage. When she sings, she makes it seem so easy, so effortless.

"**Dame Edna: My First Last Tour,**" plays Friday and Saturday, April 10 and 11. This Tony Award-winning performer has material as blue as her hair and more glitz and glitter than any trophy wife.

"**Dirty Rotten Scoundrels**" comes to the Phil for one night only, Friday, Dec. 12. When I saw this musical on Broadway, I was more impressed than when I saw "Spamalot." It's funnier than the movie, which I was lukewarm about, and has clever lyrics and catchy, hook-filled music.

A couple of one-person shows should be well-worth checking out too. Hal Holbrook, who's made a career of channeling Mark Twain, comes to the Phil Thursday, April 9, in "**Mark Twain Tonight.**" And on Sunday, Feb. 15, the talented Tovah Feldshuh revises her Broadway portrayal of Golda Mier in "**Golda's Balcony,**" which was the longest-running one-woman play on Broadway.

In recent years, the venue has started making great use of its Daniels Pavilion by holding "Cabaret in the Pavilion" and now "Jazz in the Pavilion." In the first series, vocalist/pianist **Diane Schuur** (Tuesday and Wednesday, March 17 and 18) and **Ernestine Anderson** (Friday and Saturday, Feb. 6 and 7) are the two shows I'd rush to see. And all three of the jazz series concerts look very promising: the **Turtle Island String Quartet** (Tuesday and Wednesday, Jan. 7 and 8), the **Hot Club of San Francisco** (Friday and Saturday, Feb. 20 and 21) and **Oleta Adams** (Tuesday and Wednesday, Feb. 17 and 18).

It's terrific the Phil is putting its pavilion to such good use. I hope it continues to book similar quality acts that may not necessarily be mainstream, but are still vital and worth hearing.

And on March 2, the walls of the Phil will rock with the funky New Orleans sounds of **The Neville Brothers and Dr. John**. The last time Dr. John played the Phil, I wound up dancing in the aisles with a stranger. (His music has that kind of effect.)

The year's been a strange, difficult one, with economic crisis and underhanded tactics and mud-slinging in our presidential campaigning. Amid all that struggle and ugliness, there are the arts. And thank God for them. ■

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