

THE LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS ANNOUNCES
ARRAY OF CULTURAL OFFERINGS IN
2023-24 SEASON

INCLUDES “HEADLINERS” SERIES, CENTER REP PLAYS AND MUSICALS,
BEDFORD GALLERY EXHIBITS, MORE

WALNUT CREEK, CA (May 23, 2023) — The **Lesher Center for the Arts** together with its nonprofit partner **Diablo Regional Arts Association** announces a sensational 2023-2024 season that includes a wide array of offerings, from the Women of Country & Bluegrass to the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Latinx headliners, a favorite Public Radio show, a big exhibit celebrating the tiny world of miniatures, a joyful roof-raising Gospel-infused paean to the fantastical hats worn by Southern church women, and much more. A cultural hub of the East Bay encompassing three theaters and an art gallery, the Lesher Center for the Arts lineup next season includes its **Headliners** series featuring acclaimed music and dance presentations, award-winning plays and musicals from **Center Repertory Company (Center REP)**, and a series of thought-provoking exhibits at the **Bedford Gallery**. The Center will also continue its transformative **Arts Access** program which brings stellar entertainment to students in Title 1 schools, and will unveil a new **Lesher Center in Your Neighborhood** initiative that will bring the arts directly into the community. For tickets and more information on all programs, the public may visit www.lesherartscenter.org or call the box office at (925) 943-7469 (*open Wed-Sun, 12-6pm*).

The Lesher Center Presents “Headliners” Series

Women of Country & Bluegrass Festival

Sept. 22 – 23, 2023

A celebration of female rising stars and established talent. More performances and special events to be announced.

Sara Evans
September 22, 2023
7:30pm Friday

Tickets: \$56-106

Over the last two decades, **Sara Evans** has carved a successful career anchored by her insightful songwriting and warm, evocative voice. With such enduring hits as “Suds in the Bucket,” “A Real Fine Place to Start,” “Perfect” and “A Little Bit Stronger,” she’s earned recognition as the fifth most played female artist in country radio.

An Evening with Valerie Ponzio

September 23, 2023

7:30pm Saturday

Tickets: \$15-44

Dedicated to blending Latin sounds with country music’s traditions, backed up by indomitable vocals, **Valerie Ponzio** has been proclaimed that rarest of things: something brand new in Music City. Ponzio’s message and voice drew in new and old country fans alike after she was catapulted into the spotlight by her show-stopping turn on “The Voice.”

The Doo Wop Project

January 13, 2024

7:30pm Saturday

Tickets: \$30-60

This epic show takes audiences on a journey from foundational tunes of groups like the Crests, Belmonts, and Flamingos through their influences on the sounds of Smokey Robinson, The Temptations, and The Four Seasons all the way to DooWopified versions of modern musicians including Michael Jackson, Jason Mraz, and Maroon 5. Featuring stars of Broadway’s smash hits *Jersey Boys* and *Motown: The Musical*, **The Doo Wop Project** brings unparalleled authenticity of sound and vocal excellence to recreate—and in some cases entirely reimagine—some of the greatest music in American pop and rock history.

Mountain Stage on the Road

(live Public Radio taping)

February 1, 2024

7:00pm Thursday

Tickets: \$56-106

For 40 years, **Mountain Stage** has been an institution, standing as one of the most beloved and enduring programs in public radio history, broadcasting thousands of unforgettable live performances by rising stars and veteran legends alike. This live taping features Kathy Mattea as host, Mountain Stage’s beloved house band, and 4-5 featured guest artists running the gamut of living legends and emerging artists.

Sarah McKenzie
February 15, 2024
1:00pm and 7:30pm Thursday
Tickets: \$47-62

An Australian jazz pianist, composer, vocalist, and bandleader, **Sarah McKenzie's** breezy technical style, songwriting acumen, and pronounced lyrical sense of swing have drawn comparisons to Blossom Dearie and Diana Krall. Her first three Australian ABC Music label albums received ARIA Music Award nominations, with her *Close Your Eyes* winning for Best Jazz Album. The legendary Impulse! label picked up her sessions *We Could Be Lovers* and *Paris in the Rain*. At Leshher Center for the Arts, she performs songs from her latest album *Secrets of My Heart*.

Anat Cohen Tentet
February 29, 2024
7:30pm Thursday
Tickets: \$30-60

Ever charismatic, prolific, and inspired, GRAMMY®-nominated clarinetist-saxophonist **Anat Cohen** has won hearts and minds the world over with her expressive virtuosity and delightful stage presence. The Tentet features a vibrant mix of ace New York players drawing from a diverse range of musical inspirations.

College Notes A Cappella
March 8-9, 2024
7:30pm Friday & Saturday
Tickets: \$15-44

Award-winning a cappella groups from top colleges across the nation will converge for the annual **College Notes A Cappella**, a competition-free performance showcasing a wide array of music styles and extraordinary talent. The evening emcees are Deke Sharon from *Pitch Perfect* and “The Sing-Off,” and Marcus Washington from “Today in the Bay” and “NBC News at 11.”

Dance Theatre of Harlem
April 20 - 21, 2024
7:30pm Saturday
4:00pm Sunday
Tickets: \$56-106

World-renowned **Dance Theatre of Harlem** brings empowering performances of classical and contemporary works in living demonstration of co-founder Arthur Mitchell’s premise that ballet

belongs to everyone. Founded 53 years ago by the legendary dancer and master teacher Karel Shook, **Dance Theatre of Harlem** aimed to challenge perceptions and create new opportunities. The company has since developed into one of the world's foremost ballet companies. This multi-ethnic company performs a forward-thinking repertoire that includes treasured classics and innovative contemporary works that celebrate Black culture and empowerment through the arts for all. Its performances have been hailed by critics around the world, including the *Los Angeles Times*, which lauded the company's "aching lyricism," declaring its work "A pulsing celebration of love and life." The company will present a vibrant program of treasured classics and innovative contemporary works.

Fiesta Cultural 2024

July 17 – 21, 2024

Fiesta Cultural, a week-long celebration of Latin American music, art and culture returns to the Leshner Center for the Arts. The event will include nightly performances by acclaimed headliners and a free weekend street fair – more events to be announced.

Ballet Hispánico

July 17, 2024

7:30pm Wednesday

Tickets: \$15-106

A renowned cultural treasure, **Ballet Hispánico** boasts over 50 years of innovative artistry that brings communities together to celebrate Latinx cultures through dance.

Lucky Diaz and the Family Jam Band

July 18, 2024

10:00am Thursday

Tickets: \$12 youth; \$25 adult

Families are invited to enjoy a morning of smart, crafty lyrics with irresistibly fresh pop beats.

Lucky Diaz and the Family Jam Band is a Latin GRAMMY® award-winning band, whose dual language songs explore all of the wonder and joy of a young person's life.

Spanish Harlem Orchestra

July 19, 2024

7:30pm Friday

Tickets: \$30-60

The three-time GRAMMY® winning salsa and Latin jazz band **Spanish Harlem Orchestra** sets the gold standard for excellence in authentic, New York style, hard core salsa.

Center Repertory Company

Subscriptions available May 31, 2023. Single tickets go on sale July 21, 2023.

Crowns

September 9 – October 6, 2023

By Regina Taylor

Adapted from the book by Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry

Directed by Donya K. Washington

A celebration of song, dance, cultural history – and glamorous headwear, ***Crowns*** is a musical play fusing rich storytelling in a stirring coming-of-age tale. When Chicago-born Yolanda is sent down South, she finds strength in the tales of the wise women who surround her and the powerful rituals connected to their dazzling hats. Directed by **Donya K. Washington**, ***Crowns*** is a jubilant musical that traces the roots of Gospel through contemporary hip-hop.

The Legend of Georgia McBride

November 4 – 26, 2023

By Matthew López

Directed by Elizabeth Carter

Casey is an Elvis impersonator with everything going for him, including a flashy sequin jumpsuit. But just like that, he loses his gig, rent is overdue, and his wife announces a baby on the way. So Elvis leaves the building and a drag show moves in, as “The King” transforms into an all-out queen with the help of some new friends who become the second family Casey never saw coming. Directed by **Elizabeth Carter**, ***The Legend of Georgia McBride*** is filled with snappy zingers and dance-worthy numbers.

A Christmas Carol

December 7 – 21, 2023

By Charles Dickens

Directed by Scott Denison

Choreographed by Jennifer Perry

Directed by **Scott Denison**, thousands have made Center REP’s production of ***A Christmas Carol*** a holiday classic of their annual holiday traditions. *Broadway World* praised the joyous production’s “exceptional staging,” adding, “it’s no wonder [it] sells out.” Brimming with music and dance, love and laughter, and spectacular special effects, critics have called it “The Christmas Carol to see in the Bay Area.”

Every Brilliant Thing

January 6 – 28, 2024

By Duncan Macmillan with Jonny Donahoe
Directed by Jeffrey Lo/Markus Potter

Making a list of things that make life worth living would get different responses, and what would be at the top? Ice cream? Family? The even-numbered Star Trek films? For the lead character in this uplifting solo performance, it's their mother. This surprising and immersive theatrical experience by **Duncan Macmillan** and **Jonny Donahoe** openly discusses depression, mental illness, and suicide. With poignant humor and joy, directed by **Jeffrey Lo** and **Markus Potter**, ***Every Brilliant Thing*** takes audiences on a journey through grief, healing, falling in love, and (re)discovering all that life has to give. The story is filled with opportunities for warm, fun audience participation.

Mystic Pizza

February 15 – 25, 2024

Book by Sandy Rustin

Based on the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Motion Picture

With Story and Characters by Amy Holden Jones

Musical Arrangements and Orchestrations by Carmel Dean

Choreographed by Connor Gallagher

Directed by Casey Hushion

Based on the beloved 1988 MGM rom-com, ***Mystic Pizza*** is a new musical about three working-class girls who navigate the complexities of life, love, and family in a small-town pizza joint. The infectious score features feel-good megahits of the '80s and '90s, from "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" to "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now." ***Mystic Pizza*** is presented in partnership with La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts & McCoy Rigby Entertainment.

The Great Leap

March 16 – April 7, 2024

By Lauren Yee

Directed by Nicholas C. Avila

When an American basketball team travels to Beijing for an exhibition game in 1989, the drama goes deeper than the strain between countries. For two men with a past and one teen with a future, the game is a chance to claim personal victories on and off the court. Tensions rise right up to the final buzzer as a pivotal moment in history collides with the action in the arena. Driven by rapid-fire dialogue, ***The Great Leap*** by **Lauren Lee** is a perceptive new play that explores the cultural and political risks of raising your voice and standing your ground.

Cabaret

May 25 – June 23, 2024

Book by Joe Masteroff

Based on the play by John Van Duten and Stories by Christopher Isherwood

Music by John Kander, Lyrics by Fred Ebb

Directed by Markus Potter
Choreographed by Jessica Chen
Musical Direction by Eryn Allen

One of the most successful musicals of all time, multiple Tony Award-winner *Cabaret* is set in 1929-30 Berlin during the twilight of the Jazz Age as the Nazis are ascending to power. The musical focuses on the hedonistic nightlight at the seedy Kit Kat Klub and American writer Clifford Bradshaw's encounter with English cabaret performer Sally Bowles. With grit, dance, and a highly celebrated musical score, *Cabaret* ultimately proclaims, "it can happen here."

Bedford Gallery

Emilee Enders, Curator of Exhibitions and Programs has announced starting July 1, 2023, Bedford Gallery, a contemporary arts space inside the Leshner Center, is going free. The new admission structure "Pay What you Can" community model gives every person the opportunity to experience the visual arts at a price they can afford. Those with means are invited to support those for whom admission cost would be a barrier. For more information the public may call (925) 295-1417 or visit www.bedfordgallery.com. The upcoming season includes the following exhibits:

Sight Unseen: International Photography by Blind Artists

July 8 – September 17, 2023

12pm-5pm, Wednesday through Sunday

Sight Unseen: International Photography by Blind Artists is an exhibition showcasing work by the world's most accomplished blind photographers as they explore ideas about the nature of seeing. Most artists in the exhibition are completely blind, while some are legally blind; but all perceive an image of the physical world in varying degrees. With photography as their medium, each artist brings their inner visions into the seeing world, revealing a visually rich and emotionally complex blend of physical and conceptual artworks. *Sight Unseen* is curated by Douglas McCulloh of UCR/California Museum of Photography and toured by Curatorial Assistance Traveling Exhibitions.

Bits + Pieces: Contemporary Art on a Small Scale

September 30 – December 17, 2023

12pm-5pm, Wednesday through Sunday

Bedford Gallery's fall exhibition *Bits + Pieces: Contemporary Art on a Small Scale* explores the cultural phenomenon of miniature things. From teacup dogs and ships in a bottle, to tiny dinner tables set with a feast, fascination with pint-sized items has endured the test of time. The featured artists work in micro and small-scale, creating intricate paintings, sculpture, ceramics, and installations in direct opposition to their standard-sized counterparts. With a focus on minute, precise details, this exhibition celebrates the quirky anomaly that permeates our world.

California Clay
January 13 – March 31, 2024
12pm-5pm, Wednesday through Sunday

Dedicated to all things fired, Bedford Gallery's winter exhibition presents a survey of California artists working in clay. In response to the recent ceramics renaissance in the contemporary art world, ***California Clay*** features an intriguing mix of functional and aesthetic works that highlight the versatility of the medium and celebrates ceramics as both functional and decorative art, showcasing the artistry and creativity of ceramicists living in our state.

Re-Discovering Native America: Stories in Motion with The Red Road Project
April 13 – June 23, 2024
12pm-5pm, Wednesday through Sunday

Guest curated by photographer Carlotta Cardana and artist Danielle SeeWalker, ***Re-Discovering Native America: Stories in Motion with The Red Road Project*** highlights inspiring and uplifting stories of contemporary Indigenous people and celebrates the individuals and communities that are changing the conversation around Native American cultures and legacies. With the vast and complicated historical trauma that Indigenous American people have endured, the curators' intention is to feature the positive actions and resilience of Native American people, allowing them to tell their stories from the past, present, and future in their own voices and words.

Arts Access

Since 2008, Diablo Regional Arts Association's ***Arts Access*** has offered more than 60,000 East Bay students the opportunity to experience high-quality performances and visual arts exhibitions. This outreach program makes arts programs accessible to students who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity.

For the 2023- 2024 season, the following artists are scheduled to appear.

DLUX Puppets
Alice in Wonderland

Arts Access Performances: 9:30am and 11:30am Thursday, February 22, 2024

Public Performance: 9:30am Friday, February 23, 2024

Extraordinary people-sized puppets perform alongside talented human actors as **DLUX Puppets** stages the whimsical classic *Alice in Wonderland*. In this engaging family-friendly production, Alice takes a trip down the rabbit hole and journeys through Wonderland, a magical place inhabited by a cast of charming characters including the curious Cheshire Cat, a mysterious caterpillar, an evil Queen of Hearts, and a Mad Hatter who beckons she join his tea party.

Audiences of all ages will be dazzled by this lively performance.

Paige Hernandez

Arts Access Performances: 11:00am Thursday, May 9, and Friday, May 10, 2024

Paige Hernandez is a choreographer and playwright who has collaborated with Lincoln Center and has been commissioned by companies including the National New Play Network, the Smithsonian, The Kennedy Center, La Jolla Playhouse, and the Glimmerglass Festival. Hernandez has been named a “Citizen Artist Fellow” with the Kennedy Center, a “Rising Leader of Color” by Theatre Communications Group, and one of “Six Theatre Workers You Should Know” by American Theatre Magazine. She will present an original work geared to multicultural and multigenerational hip hop audiences.

Lesher Center in Your Neighborhood

Launching this year, the *Lesher Center in Your Neighborhood* series will bring performances and special events outside the Center’s walls directly to the local community.

The Concert Truck

March 18 – 24, 2024

Performance times and locations to be announced

The Concert Truck, created by award-winning pianists Nick Luby and Susan Zhang, will bring their mobile music venue to multiple locations in spring 2024, making live music accessible to everyone.

About the Lesher Center for the Arts

The **Lesher Center for the Arts** is the premier arts venue in Central Contra Costa County. Located in the heart of downtown Walnut Creek, the center offers three separate theatres and an art gallery presenting the best of theater, ballet, comedy, and visual art events.

About Center REPertory Company

Center REP is the resident professional theatre company of the Lesher Center for the Arts. Its season consists of six productions—a variety of classic and contemporary musicals, dramas, and comedies, presented with artistic excellence and high professional standards. Center REP’s mission is to celebrate the power of the human imagination by producing emotionally engaging, intellectually involving, and visually astonishing live theatre, and through Outreach and Education programs, to enrich and advance the cultural life of the communities it serves.

About Bedford Gallery

Bedford Gallery is a contemporary art space housed in the City of Walnut Creek's Lesher Center for the Arts exhibiting the work of historic, modern, and contemporary artists. In conjunction with each exhibition, Bedford Gallery offers engaging workshops for the public, varying from arts and crafts with featured artists, to dance performances and gastronomic experiences, and more. The Gallery provides the public with opportunities to learn about visual arts through public programs that are varied, accessible, challenging, and educational, and its mission is to provide exhibitions and other programs that both reflect and engage the diverse

audiences of the entire Contra Costa region. In addition to organizing and presenting several exhibitions each year, The Gallery offers lectures, workshops, panel discussions, and other public programs. With 3,500 square feet of exhibition space, Bedford Gallery is the largest community-based visual arts facility between the Bay Area and Sacramento.

About the Diablo Regional Arts Association

The **Diablo Regional Arts Association** (DRAA) is the non-profit partner of the Leshner Center for the Arts, and is an active partner in its programming and audience outreach. The organization aims to achieve artistic excellence by providing exceptional arts programming through quality live theatre, visual arts, and youth education at the Leshner Center for the Arts, while providing avenues of accessibility for everyone to enjoy the arts.

For Calendar Editors

WHAT: The **Leshner Center for the Arts** together with its nonprofit partner **Diablo Regional Arts Association** announces a sensational 2023-2024 season that includes a wide array of offerings, from the Women of Country & Bluegrass to the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Latinx headliners, a favorite Public Radio show, a big exhibit celebrating the tiny world of miniatures, a joyful roof-raising Gospel-infused paean to the fantastical hats worn by Southern church women, and much more. A cultural hub of the East Bay encompassing three theaters and an art gallery, the Leshner Center for the Arts lineup next season includes its **Headliners** series featuring acclaimed music and dance presentations, award-winning plays and musicals at **Center Repertory Company (Center REP)**, and a series of thought-provoking exhibits at the **Bedford Gallery**. The Center will also continue its transformative **Arts Access** program which brings stellar entertainment to students in Title 1 schools, and will unveil a new **Leshner Center in Your Neighborhood** initiative that will bring the arts directly into the community.

WHERE: Leshner Center for the Arts (1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek)

WHEN: **September 2023 – July 2024**

Leshner Center Presents:

Fri. Sept. 22, & Sat. Sept. 23, 2023: Women of Country & Bluegrass Festival

Fri, Sept. 22, 2023: Sara Evans

Sat, Sept. 23, 2023: An Evening with Valerie Ponzio

Sat, Jan. 13, 2024: The Doo Wop Project

Thurs, Feb. 1, 2024: Mountain Stage on the Road

Thurs, Feb, 15, 2024: Sarah McKenzie

Thurs, Feb. 29, 2024: Anat Cohen Tentet

Fri, Mar. 8, 2024 & Sat, Mar. 9, 2024: College Notes A Cappella

Sat, Apr. 20, 2024 & Sun, Apr. 21, 2024: Dance Theatre of Harlem

July 17 – 21, 2024: Fiesta Cultural

Wed, July 17, 2024: Ballet Hispánico
Thurs, July 18, 2024: Lucky Diaz and the Family Jam Band
Fri, July 19, 2024: Spanish Harlem Orchestra

Center Repertory Company:

Sept. 9 – Oct. 6, 2023: Crowns
Nov. 4 – 26, 2023: The Legend of Georgia McBride
Dec. 7 – 21, 2023: A Christmas Carol
Jan. 6 – 28, 2024: Every Brilliant Thing
Feb. 15 – 25, 2024: Mystic Pizza
Mar. 16 – Apr. 7, 2024: The Great Leap
May 25 – Jun. 23, 2024: Cabaret

Bedford Gallery:

July 8 – Sept. 17, 2023: Sight Unseen: International Photography by Blind Artists
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Apr. 13 – Jun. 23, 2024: Re-Discovering Native America: Stories in Motion with The Red Road Project

INFO: For tickets or more information, the public may visit www.lesherartscenter.org or call the box office at (925) 943-7469 (*open Wed-Sun, 12-6pm*).

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PHOTOS: Media may download high-res photos at: <https://cbpr.co/press/lesher23-24/>