

Arts & Entertainment

FORWARD INTO

FA

BY
REBECCA
WALLACE



Anna Finkle

MUSIC

Trumpeter Etienne Charles is a fitting choice to grace the Weekly cover this week. Not only is he quite photogenic (hello, impish smile), he epitomizes the musical offerings at Stanford Lively Arts this season.

Many campus concerts in 2011-12 will showcase the sounds of the islands, including the Etienne Charles Quintet on April 4. Island accents including calypso are sure to be prominent when this acoustic group — featuring Charles, who hails from Trinidad — plays.

Other performers with an island flavor will include the Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés & the Afro-Cuban Messengers on Feb. 19; Hawaiian slack-key guitarist Keola Beamer and singer Raiatea Helm on May 6; and trombonist Josh Roseman, who celebrates his Jamaican roots in a concert with his sextet on Nov. 12.

The Lively Arts season also includes ample offerings of string quartets; a helping of Gershwin with the pianist Kevin Cole and tenor Ryan Vandenboom on Dec. 3; and, on Oct. 26, beats galore from the chipper four musicians of Sō Percussion. Ticket prices vary, and concerts are held in various venues at Stanford University. Call 650-725-ARTS or go to livelyarts.stanford.edu.

Some Lively Arts performers also give short free concerts at the Community School of Music and Arts at 230 San Antonio Circle in Mountain View; the Etienne Charles Quintet will do so on April 3. More info is at arts4all.org.

In other music news, the composer and Palo Alto native Deborah Lurie has more notes to share with the Peninsula.

Once a student at Gunn High School, she's now often known for her film scores ("Dear John," "Justin Bieber: Never Say Never," the upcoming "Footloose" re-

(continued on next page)

If you filled your calendar with the highlights of the Palo Alto area's 2011-12 arts season, you'd be writing (or typing) up a mini-United Nations.

New and notable performers and performances will include: an Israeli hip-hop violinist, a Cuban pianist, a play about an Iranian family, a dance piece on the Taiwanese-American experience, visual art inspired by a French sculptor and the brand-new Palo Alto International Film Festival.

In the Weekly's annual fall arts preview, we visit some of the top destinations of the A&E season. Happy travels.

LOCAL
ARTS
GROUPS
STEP
AHEAD
INTO
THE NEW
SEASON



Clockwise from far left: Hugo Robus' 1925 bronze sculpture "Blackbottom" is in a Cantor Arts Center show of artists influenced by Rodin; Andrea Weber of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; cast members from the 1970s-flavored Lanford Wilson play "Fifth of July" at The Pear Avenue Theatre; Ethiopian art on display at the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center; West African singer Angélique Kidjo.



On the cover: Etienne Charles will perform at Stanford University and at the Community School of Music and Arts in April. Photo by Laura Ferreira.



Nabil Elderkin



Singer Raiatea Helm and Hawaiian slack-key guitarist Keola Beamer will bring island flavor to Stanford University on May 6.

Fall arts preview

(continued from previous page)

make) and string arrangements for popular music (Kelly Clarkson's "All I Ever Wanted," 3 Doors Down's "Time of My Life"). Now she's writing a string quartet that is scheduled to be premiered next spring by Palo Alto's Ives Quartet.

The new work will share the bill with pieces by Mozart and Debussy in a 3 p.m. concert on April 29 at the First Congregational Church, 1985 Louis Road, Palo Alto. Tickets are \$15 general and \$10 for students and seniors. Call 650-224-7849 or go to ivesquartet.org.

For strings of a different sort, concert patrons can head to the Oshman

Family Jewish Community Center on Oct. 22 to see Miri Ben-Ari, billed as "the hip-hop violinist." The Israeli musician is classically trained but now mixes R&B, jazz and other flavors into her sound, and has collaborated with Kanye West, Jay-Z and Alicia Keys.

Her concert is set for 8:30 p.m. at 3921 Fabian Way in Palo Alto. Tickets are \$50 general, \$40 for JCC members and \$75 for a VIP ticket that includes a reception with the artist. Go to paloaltojcc.org or call 650-223-8692.

Other musicians scheduled to perform at the JCC this season include the Klezmasters on Oct. 6 and singer Chava Alberstein on Dec. 11.

Over at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, up-and-coming teen Palo



The sprightly men of Sō Percussion perform a tribute to the late composer John Cage at Stanford University on Oct. 26.



Clarinetist David Shifrin and horn player Radovan Vlatkovic will perform with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center at Music@Menlo on Feb. 12.

Alto pianist Hilda Huang will be making her debut with the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra on Nov. 19. The young Bach fan, who has also played at Carnegie Hall and the Carmel Bach Festival, will solo in Haydn's Piano Concerto in D Major at the free 8 p.m. concert at St. Mark's Episcopal Church at 600 Colorado Ave. in Palo Alto. Details about this concert and the orchestra's season are at sfchamberorchestra.org.

The area is full of sharp young musicians who just might be headed for Carnegie Hall someday as well. They often perform during the school year with groups including the California Youth Symphony (cys.org), the Cantabile Youth Singers (cantabile.org), the



El Camino Youth Symphony (ecys.org), the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra (pacomusic.org) and the Ragazzi Boys Chorus (ragazzi.org).

Other highlights of the upcoming music season include:

The Aurora Singers

Peter Yarrow's "Light One Candle" keeps company with Saint-Saëns' "Ave Maria" on the singers' quirky holiday program, set for Dec. 17 at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto, 505 E. Charleston Road. aurorasingers.net

Bay Choral Guild

Programs this year include "Psalms of David," a selection of psalm set-

tings from varied nations and times, to be sung in March in Palo Alto. baychoralguild.org

California Bach Society

The Palo Alto chamber choir opens its season with Bach's "Magnificat" in D major for orchestra, choir and vocal soloists on Oct. 15 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 600 Colorado Ave., Palo Alto. 415-262-0272, calbach.org

Chamber Music San Francisco

The group brings concerts to the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center at 3921 Fabian Way in Palo Alto. The season begins with the Tokyo String Quartet on Feb. 13. 415-759-1756, chambermusicssf.org

Fortnightly Music Club

The club starts its season of free concerts Oct. 9 with a program including "Latin-American Dances" for piano (four hands) by the contemporary composer Sondra Clark. At the Lucie Stern Community Center, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. fortnightlymusicclub.org

Magnificat

This season, the San Francisco choral and instrumental group focuses on four 17th-century composers: Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Iacomo Carissimi, Heinrich Schütz and Claudio Monteverdi. Several concerts are in Palo Alto; details at 415-265-2948, magnificatbaroque.com

Music@Menlo

The summer chamber-musical festival also now has a "Winter Series," which starts this season on Oct. 2 with the pianist Inon Barnatan. Concerts are at the Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton High School, 555 Middlefield Road, Atherton. 650-331-0202, musicatmenlo.org

New Century Chamber Orchestra

Violinist Stuart Canin, who was the NCCO's first music director and also served as concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony and Opera, solos in Felix Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in D Minor on Sept. 23 at the First United Methodist Church, 625 Hamilton Ave., Palo Alto. 415-357-1111, ncco.org

Palo Alto Philharmonic

A new work by composer-in-residence Lee Actor is on the program for



The Palo Alto Int'l Film Festival

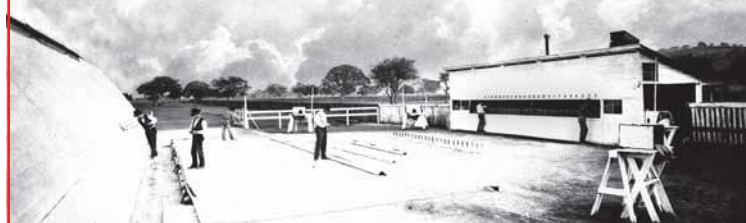
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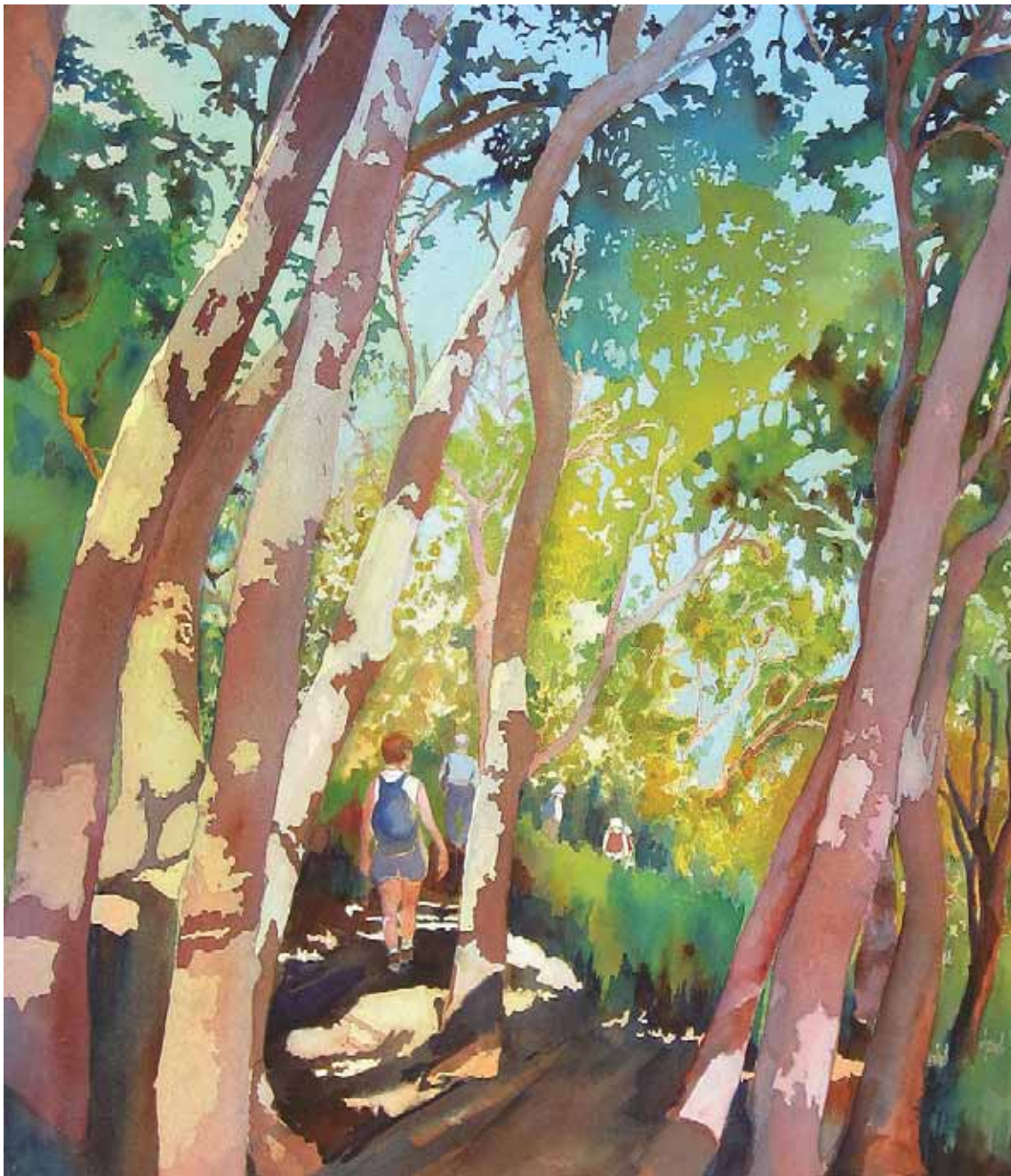
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Watercolor paintings by Nancy Calhoun are on display at Viewpoints Gallery in Los Altos through Oct. 1.

the April 14 concert at Spangenberg Theatre, 780 Arastradero Road, Palo Alto. paphil.org

Peninsula Women's Chorus

A premiere piece by Ted Hearne, commissioned to mark the chorus' 45th anniversary, will bow May 12 at a concert at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 600 Colorado Ave., Palo Alto. 650-327-2095, pwchorus.org

Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra

The Dutch recorder player Marion Verbruggen will be featured in concerts by Vivaldi and Sammartini at the Nov. 17 concert at the Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton High School, 555 Middlefield Road, Atherton. philharmoniabaroque.org

Redwood Bluegrass Associates

The Windy Hill band (founded by two Menlo-Atherton High School graduates) plays on Oct. 22, with Palo Alto's Tuttle family and singer AJ Lee on Nov. 12. Shows are at the First Presbyterian Church at 1667 Miramonte Ave., Mountain View. 650-691-9982, rba.org.

Saint Michael Trio

In residence at Menlo College, the three musicians also have concerts planned Nov. 18 at Menlo, Jan. 7 at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, and March 20 at the Oshman Family Jewish Community

Center. saintmichaeltrio.com

San Francisco Early Music Society

An Oct. 21 concert featuring Ensemble Caprice looks at Gypsies' musical influence on composers from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. At First Lutheran Church, 600 Homer Ave., Palo Alto. 510-528-1725, sfems.org.

Schola Cantorum

The season includes a March 11 program of music by Moses Hogan, known for his arrangements of African-American spirituals. At First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, 1985 Louis Road. 650-254-1700, scholacantorum.org

Soli Deo Gloria

"A Tale of Two Requiems" pairs the early-Baroque "Musikalische Exequien" by Heinrich Schütz with "Requiem" by contemporary British composer Bob Chilcott on March 10 at First Lutheran Church, 600 Homer Ave., Palo Alto. 888-SDG-SONG, sdgloria.org

Stanford Jazz Workshop

The annual summer festival of concerts, workshops and jams will be in its 41st season next year. Stanford University, 650-736-0324, stanfordjazz.org

Stanford Music Department

The youthful JACK Quartet, which

champions contemporary music, comes to campus to perform works by Stanford student composers on Oct. 19 and 20. Department concerts are in various venues on campus. music.stanford.edu

Twilight Concert Series

The city of Palo Alto hosts free concerts each summer in parks and other local spots, often with rock, swing and R&B. Details will go up next year at cityofpaloalto.org.

World Music Day

Organizers are already planning for the fourth annual free outdoor musical festival on June 17. Indie-rock, blues, jazz, world-music players and other musicians perform in downtown Palo Alto. pamusicday.org

Other local venues for live music include:

The CoHo Stanford Coffee House

On the calendar: rapper Keith Cross, Sept. 21; and the electronic synth/guitar/bass/electric violin band Levitate, Sept. 30 and Oct. 29. 459 Lagunita #1, Stanford University. 650-721-2262, coho.stanford.edu

Community School of Music and Arts

Periodic concerts include a look at Asian musical heritage with the Fire- (continued on next page)

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CHRIS AYERS PHOTO JOINTLY PRODUCED WITH THE PACKARD HUMANITIES INSTITUTE CITY OF SAN JOSE CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY



The three-paneled oil painting "Ice Walls" is among the nature-themed works by Stanford artist Sukey Bryan soon to be exhibited at the Community School of Music and Arts.

Fall arts preview

(continued from previous page)

bird Youth Chinese Orchestra and other performers on Oct. 9. 230 San Antonio Circle, Mountain View. 650-917-6800, arts4all.org

Dana Street Roasting Company

Scott Amendola, G.E. Stinson and Phillip Greenleaf play the café with grooves, electronics and lots of improv on Oct. 23. 744 W. Dana St., Mountain View. 650-390-9638, danastreetroasting.com

Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts

Pianist Tigran Hamasyan and Aratta Rebirth play experimental jazz, folk and progressive music on Oct. 2. 500 Castro St., Mountain View. 650-903-6000, mvcpa.com

Oak City Bar and Grill

Blues Cadillac plays blues, rock

and dance music on Sept. 23. 1029 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. 650-321-6882, oakcitybarandgrill.com

Red Rock Coffee

San Francisco's pianist Rabbit Quinn brings on the alternative piano rock Sept. 17. 201 Castro St., Mountain View. 650-967-4473, redrockcoffee.org

MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

The French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) has long had a prominent place at Stanford University's Cantor Arts Center, with plenty of gallery space and a sculpture garden.

From Oct. 5 through Jan. 1, the Cantor looks at the creator of "The Thinker" from another angle with two new exhibitions. "Rodin and America: Influence and Adaptation 1876-1936" crosses the Atlantic to spotlight works by American artists who took inspiration from Monsieur Rodin. They

include Georgia O'Keeffe, Gaston Lachaise, John Storrs and Edward Steichen.

Meanwhile, students from Stanford's Dance Division have analyzed the links between movement and Rodin's work, and will display their gesture drawings. Archival footage of Isadora Duncan, Rodin's main dance muse, will be shown in the gallery with video of students reenacting her moves. In addition, the students will hold public rehearsals with dance lecturer Muriel Maffre and dance artist Alonzo King.

Other exhibitions at the Cantor this season include a show focusing on the American photographer Walker Evans, opening Feb. 1; and "plexigram" sculptures with printed words by the composer John Cage, starting June 13.

The Cantor Arts Center is at Lomita Drive and Museum Way at Stanford; go to museum.stanford.edu or call 650-723-4177.



"Reflections of NYC" is among the paintings by Sue Averell that will be up at Stanford Art Spaces later this fall.

Across town, the Palo Alto Art Center at 1313 Newell Road is undergoing renovations and closed for the season behind a festive mural painted by Palo Alto artist Judy Gittelsohn and others. But the center's events will continue in other area locations. The annual Great Glass Pumpkin Patch, for example, will be in Rinconada Park at 777 Embarcadero Road, with an exhibit Sept. 27 through 30 and a sale of the glass creations on Oct. 1 and 2.

The yearly Day of the Dead celebration events will be at the Lucie Stern Community Center, the Palo Alto Children's Library and the Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo on Oct. 30.

For more about the art center, go to cityofpaloalto.org/artcenter.

Anderson Collection

Even though the Anderson Collection — a large private Menlo Park assemblage — is slated to make a major

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A portrait of Miriam and Saed Achwall in "The Israeli Project," a photo show by Mark Tuschman.

art donation to Stanford University in 2014, there's still plenty to see at the Anderson, and free public tours on the third Thursday of most months. Reservations are required; call 650-854-5160 or email ksaracino@aacollection.com.

Computer History Museum

A talk on the technology of animation will be part of the museum's speaker series on Nov. 8, with Jeffrey Katzenberg and Ed Leonard of DreamWorks Animation speaking. 1401 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View. 650-810-1010, computerhistory.org

Los Altos History Museum

At "Train Days" this weekend, Sept. 17 and 18, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.,

railroad enthusiasts bring in train-track layouts and models, and there are train-themed activities for young children. 51 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos. 650-948-9427, losaltoshistory.org

Museum of American Heritage

The exhibition "A Child's World: Antique Toys, 1870-1930" opens Dec. 9, along with the annual holiday LEGO show. 351 Homer Ave., Palo Alto. 650-321-1004, moah.org

Palo Alto Junior Museum and Zoo

Kids have been getting up close and personal with creepy-crawlies live and preserved in the newest exhibit, "Bzzzzz." The zoo is also planning a new meerkat habitat. 1451 Middlefield

Road, Palo Alto. 650-329-2111, cityof-paloalto.org

GALLERIES

Acclaimed Menlo Park photographer Mark Tuschman, who often focuses his lens on health care and other global issues, has a new solo exhibition opening Nov. 1 at the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center in Palo Alto.

Titled "The Israeli Project: Faces and Stories of the Middle East," the show depicts the land's diverse history and population through its people's faces. About half of the Jews who came to Israel during its formation arrived from other areas in the Middle East, while the others came from all over the world, according to an exhibit press release. The show will be in the Freidenrich Conference Center through Feb. 2, with a free reception set for Nov. 3 from 7 to 8 p.m.

Other visual art planned at the JCC includes aerial photographs of the striking — but drying — Dead Sea, by Ofir Ben Tov, on display now through Oct. 28; and embroidered tapestries by Ethiopian Israeli women, on display now through Dec. 15. The JCC is at 3921 Fabian Way. To schedule a viewing of an exhibition, call 650-223-8669 or email boxoffice@paloaltojcc.org.

In Menlo Park, the Portola Art Gallery commences a new program this fall: free monthly painting demonstrations at the gallery in the Allied Arts Guild. Oil painter Decker Walker starts the series from 10 a.m. to noon this Saturday, Sept. 17, painting a por-

trait from a live model while thinking aloud and answering questions.

Other artists set for later demos are plein-air landscape painter Mark Monsarrat, on Oct. 29; and portrait painter Marsha Heimbecker, on Nov. 17. The gallery is at 75 Arbor Road, open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Go to portolaartgallery.com or call 650-321-0220.

Bryant Street Gallery

Abstract painter Teresa Stanley shows her colorful, patterned acrylic works on wood panels through the end of September. 532 Bryant St., Palo Alto. 650-321-8155, bryantstreet.com

Gallery 9

Artist Joyce Savre Hutt has combined handwritten poetry with paint to create the works on canvas in "Translation: Language As Image." The exhibition will be up Sept. 27-Oct. 22. 143 Main St., Los Altos. 650-941-7969, gallery9losaltos.com

Gallery House

"Fashion and Fusion" is the theme of the next exhibition (Sept. 20-Oct. 15), with oil paintings by Wendy Fitzgerald, acrylic paintings by Sydell Lewis and ceramic works by Kiyoco Michot. 320 S. California Ave., Palo Alto. 650-326-1668, galleryhouse2.com

Lyons Ltd. Antique Prints

The fall show "Wine, Women & Song" explores these three elements through etchings, lithographs and engravings. Artists include Picasso, Rackham and Daumier. 10 Town and

Country Village, Palo Alto. 650-325-9010, lyonsltd.com

Mohr Gallery at the Community School of Music and Arts

Sukey Bryan paints the natural world, but not your typical landscapes. Her dynamic scenes depict wildfires, rainstorms and volcanoes. A new exhibition of her paintings runs Oct. 14-Nov. 27 at CSMA, 230 San Antonio Circle, Mountain View. 650-917-6800, arts4all.org

Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts

The lobby is also a gallery; upcoming art includes abstract acrylic paintings by Harriet Helfright, Oct. 18-Dec. 12. 500 Castro St., Mountain View. 650-903-6000, mvcpa.com

Pacific Art League

Shows this season in the league's galleries will include: landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes in November; small works in December; and cartoons and illustrations in January. 668 Ramona St., Palo Alto. 650-321-3891, pacificartleague.org

Stanford Art Spaces

That sassy subject San Francisco is a favorite muse for urban-landscape painter Marianne Bland. Her works are up Sept. 30-Dec. 1 with the blaring colors of painter Carmen Barefield and the thickly painted cityscapes of Sue Averell. Paul G. Allen Building, Stanford. 650-725-3622, cis.stanford.edu/~marigros

(continued on next page)

DEBORAH'S PALM
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DEBORAH'S PALM
The Peninsula's only non-profit Women's Community Center, located in downtown Palo Alto.

We offer services and classes, uniquely designed for women of all ages... come join our circle of support!

For the complete list of new Fall activities, please visit our website: deborahspalm.org
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september highlights
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Fall arts preview

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Thomas Welton Stanford Art Gallery

Kevin Bean, who lectures at Stanford University in painting and drawing, is showing his work in an exhibition called "Journey to the Edges of Color," Oct. 11-Nov. 20. 419 Lasuen Mall, Stanford. 650-723-2842. art.stanford.edu

Viewpoints Gallery

Shows coming up at this gallery include: watercolors by Nancy Calhoun, now through the end of September; bicycle-themed paintings by Terri Hill in October; and bird paintings by biological illustrator Floy Zittin. 315 State St., Los Altos. 650-941-5789, viewpointsgallery.com

THEATER

Menlo Park playwright Margy Kahn has been working with Pear Avenue Theatre artistic director Diane Tasca for years to develop her new play "Familiar Strangers." Next March, the script is scheduled for its first curtain call.

The play follows an Iranian family living in Los Angeles, dealing with culture wars and a timeless generation gap: mother versus Americanized teen daughter. It's set during the spring festival of Nowruz ("New Day"), the Iranian New Year.

The new work is set to be performed March 2 through March 18, co-directed by Tasca and Weekly theater critic Jeanie K. Smith. It will

be part of the Pear's 10th-anniversary season, which opens Sept. 16 with the Lanford Wilson play "The Fifth of July."

Other plays at the Pear this season are: "Mauritius," "A Moon for the Misbegotten," "Bach at Leipzig," "Pear Slices 2012" and "Mrs. Warren's Profession." Shows are at 1220 Pear Ave., Unit K, Mountain View. Tickets are \$15-\$30. Call 650-254-1148 or go to thepear.org.

Another world premiere, "Clementine in the Lower 9," opens at TheatreWorks next month, with previews Oct. 5 through Oct. 7 and opening night on Oct. 8. The Dan Dietz play is set in post-Katrina New Orleans, with an onstage jazz band chiming in to help tell the tale of a musician and his wife. Music is by Justin Ellington. The show runs through Oct. 30.

Also brand-new is the musical "Wheelhouse," the latest show presented by the pop-rock trio GrooveLily at TheatreWorks. The show opens in June and centers on a traveling rock band.

Other shows at TheatreWorks this season are: "Sense and Sensibility" (through Sept. 25), "The Secret Garden," "The Pitmen Painters," "Now Circa Then" and "Of Mice and Men." Tickets are typically \$29-\$49, with performances at the Lucie Stern Theatre, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto; or at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, 500 Castro St., Mountain View. Call 650-463-1960 or go to theatreworks.org.

Bus Barn Stage Company

"Shout! The Mod Musical (through

Oct. 1), "Almost, Maine," "Doubt: A Parable," "The Government Inspector," "The Clean House." 97 Hillview Ave., Los Altos. 650-941-0551, busbarn.org

Dragon Productions

"Sister Cities," "Stones In His Pockets," "Marvin's Room," "Cat's Paw," "Wonderful World." 535 Alma St., Palo Alto. 650-493-2006, dragonproductions.net

Foothill College Theatre Arts Department/Foothill Music Theatre

"The Laramie Project, Parts I and II," "All Shook Up," an evening of one-acts, "The Knight of the Burning Pestle." 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills. 650-949-7360, foothill.edu/theatre

Palo Alto Children's Theatre

Mainstage season: "Pinocchio," "Junie B. in Jingle Bells Batman Smells," "Go, Dog. Go!," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Pinkalicious." 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. 650-463-4930, cit-yofpaloalto.org

Palo Alto Players

"Nonsense With A Twist," "Parade," "Aftermath," "Give 'Em Hell, Harry," "Annie," "The Lieutenant of Inishmore." 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. 650-329-0891, paplayers.org

Peninsula Youth Theatre

CenterStage Musicals performed at the Mountain View Center for the



Mark Kitaoka

Laiona Michelle and Jack Koenig in TheatreWorks' production of "Clementine in the Lower 9."

Performing Arts: "Cats," "Cinderella," "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," "A Year With Frog and Toad," "Hairspray." 500 Castro St., Mountain View. Company contact: 650-988-8798, pytnet.org

DANCE AND OPERA

On Nov. 1, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company bids farewell both to the Bay Area and to its late founder, who was a major figure in the American avant-garde for decades.

Cunningham died at 90 in 2009, and his company is now on a "Legacy Tour" to give audiences "a final

opportunity to see Cunningham's choreography performed by the company he personally trained," as the company's website puts it. The last Bay Area stop on the tour is at Stanford University's Memorial Auditorium, presented by Stanford Lively Arts.

The 8 p.m. program will feature a restaged version of Cunningham's final work, "Nearly 90." Tickets are \$30-\$85 general; go to livelyarts.stanford.edu or call 650-725-ARTS.

Also on the Lively Arts docket this season is the acrobatic, gymnastic Diavolo Dance Theatre, whose

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members perform on giant cubes and other props. Shows are planned for Jan. 28. Then, on May 3, David Zambrano's Soul Project will give a soul music-set dance performance at the Cantor Arts Center.

Elsewhere in the dance world, "Zero Hour," a modern, hip-hop work about a Taiwanese immigrant reflecting on her life and her son's future, comes to the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts at 500 Castro St. at 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 23 and at 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 24.

The work is presented by Dancers Group and Philein/ZiRu Productions — which focuses on issues of the "Chinese-American diaspora" — and will also feature visual art and percussion. Admission is \$15-\$25; go to ziruproductions.com.

In opera this season, French grand opera meets the Bible in a tale of a most unfortunate haircut. West Bay Opera kicks off its 56th season on Oct. 14 with Camille Saint-Saëns' "Samson et Dalila." Company director José Luis Moscovich takes the baton, with Ragnar Conde the stage director of this production, which runs through Oct. 23, in French with English titles.

Later in the season, West Bay Opera will present Mozart's "Don Giovanni," Feb. 17 through Feb. 26. The last production will be Verdi's "Aida," May 25 through June 3. Tickets are \$40-\$70.

The company also offers free piano previews of its operas, on Oct. 6, Feb. 9 and May 17. Performances are at the Lucie Stern Theatre, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. 650-424-9999, wbopera.org

Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts

Other dance troupes set for the CPA stage this season include: San Francisco's Smuin Ballet, in December, February and May; Theatre Flamenco of San Francisco, in November; and various ballet companies doing "The Nutcracker" and other winter-themed pieces. 500 Castro St., Mountain View. 650-903-6000, mvcpa.com

San Francisco Opera Guild, Peninsula chapter

Scholars of opera give preview lectures for San Francisco Opera productions. Talks on "Lucrezia Borgia" and "Don Giovanni" are coming up on Sept. 20 and Oct. 11, respectively. At First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, 1140 Cowper St. sfopera.com/Opera-Guild/Preview-Lectures.aspx

Stanford Savoyards

This student-run company has an abiding fondness for Gilbert and Sullivan. A new production of "The Pirates of Penzance" opens in January at Stanford University's Dinkelspiel Auditorium. stanford.edu/group/savoyards

BOOKS AND FILM

Palo Alto gets its own film festival this year with the launching of the Palo Alto International Film Festival at the end of September.

A free outdoor screening of "Life In A Day" on Ramona Street in downtown Palo Alto (between Everett and Hawthorne avenues) at 8 p.m. on Sept. 29 kicks off the four-day gathering of screenings, talks, panel discussions and workshops. There will be feature films, shorts, documentaries

and animated movies shown. All will showcase innovation and technology, whether in the film's subject matter or in the way it was made.

Most events will be at the Palo Alto Square movie theater at 3000 El Camino Real, the Aquarius Theatre at 430 Emerson St., or Talenhouse at 542 High St. Event prices vary. For details, go to paiff.net.

Other festivals likely to bring screenings back to Palo Alto this year include the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival and the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. Info is not up yet at svjff.org and sfjff.org, but will likely be soon.

In the world of books, Kepler's Books has started charging for its popular author talks, but the events continue on. (Listeners who aren't bookstore members must buy the event book or a \$10 gift card to admit two.)

The array of authors scheduled soon includes: Eric Schmitt ("Counterstrike: The Untold Story of America's Secret Campaign Against Al Qaeda") on Sept. 18; youth authors Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman ("Superhero Joe") and Robin Preiss Glasser ("Fancy Nancy") on Sept. 19; and Patricia J. Machmiller ("Autumn Loneliness: The Letters of Kiyoshi and Kiyoko Tokutomi") on Sept. 20.

Kepler's is at 1010 El Camino Real in Menlo Park. Call 650-324-4321 or go to keplers.com.

Other area bookstores that regularly host author talks include Books Inc. at 74 Town & Country Village, Palo Alto (650-321-0600) and at 301 Castro St., Mountain View (650-428-1234, booksinc.net). Debra Samuels speaks in Palo Alto at 7 p.m. on Sept. 23 about "My Japanese Table: A Lifetime of Cooking with Friends and Family."

Book Arts Jam

The annual Book Arts Jam, scheduled this year for Oct. 15, shows off the myriad of typefaces, papers, shapes, sizes, colors and visions that go into creating art books. Foothill College, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills. bookartsjam.org

French Film Club of Palo Alto

Upcoming films include the Jean-Paul Belmondo classic "Breathless," to be shown at 8 p.m. on Sept. 27. Movies always have English subtitles and come with refreshments and discussion. At All Saints' Episcopal Church, 555 Waverley St., Palo Alto. frenchfilmclubofpaloalto.org

Silicon Valley African Film Festival

The history of music in Tanzania, and a Ghana fishing village that produces professional boxers are among the subjects in this festival of feature films, shorts and animation. Oct. 14-16 at the Community School of Music and Arts, 230 San Antonio Circle, Mountain View. svaff.org

United Nations Association Film Festival

"Education is a Human Right" is the theme of the 14th annual festival, which explores contemporary, inspiring and tough issues and stories from a myriad of countries. Oct. 21-30, with screenings in Palo Alto, East Palo Alto and San Francisco, and at Stanford University. 650-724-5544, unaff.org ■

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Eating Out

RESTAURANT REVIEW



Heather Lee

The fusion-eatery Mantra has new life as a more casual but still very appealing space.

Refined and relaxed

New menu, chef and casual ambiance bring freshness to Palo Alto's Mantra

by Dale F. Bentson

The Indian subcontinent has always met California cuisine at Mantra, the five-year-old restaurant on Emerson Street in Palo Alto. The original tilt had been towards India. Recently, the axis has shifted more towards California, with accents and overtones of India.

A small plate/large plate menu debuted in March along with new executive chef Shachi Mehra, an experienced professional with an accomplished résumé. There are two dozen tapas-styled small-plate offerings and more than a dozen entrées that can be ordered as full or half orders. Every dish I tried was appealing: some more exciting than others, but there was nothing I can't rec-

ommend.

Mantra is the brainchild of Ashwani Dhawan, who also owns SliderBarCafe on University Avenue. The chef and menu aren't the only changes at his Mantra. Gone is the partition that separated the dining room and lounge; gone are the tablecloths and formality of ambiance. It's decidedly more casual now, but still aesthetically appealing, open and spacious, with bare wood-topped tables, and more affordable and approachable.

The small-plates part of the menu offers an array of options. Steamed mussels masala (\$8.95) was a near-overflowing bowl of

(continued on next page)

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Eating Out

(continued from previous page)

black bivalves blanketed in a thick sauce of tamarind, fennel and coconut. The masala, a blend of spices, gave the dish a delicious piquancy.

I thought the crispy greens (\$4.95) terrific. Arugula and spinach leaves had been lightly battered, deep-fried and piled high on a small platter. The batter was a tad thicker than a tempura batter and suited the leaves perfectly. The dish came with a tasty tamarind chutney.

The Chat Chat fried popovers (\$4.95) were golf ball-sized and stuffed with potato and chickpeas and topped with tamarind and mint chutneys. Dhawan told me this is considered street food in India.

The day-boat scallops (\$11.95) had been perfectly seared and retained their meaty juiciness. The scallops were set on a tangy sauce of pink peppercorns, fennel, cauliflower purée and caviar. The mollusks nearly melted on the tongue.

The lamb lollipops (\$9.95) were fun to eat and the heartiest of the small-plate offerings. Ground lamb was rolled into balls and rubbed with green chilies. The sticks of the lollipops were cinnamon sticks. Tamarind-and-mushroom chutney accompanied.

Large plates are offered in two sizes, full or as half orders. The half orders are larger than small plates, which is somewhat confusing. With full orders there is plenty to share; half orders you might want to keep for yourself.

The methi pork chops (\$11.95 half, \$19.95 full) were marinated Porterhouse (center-cut) chops. A good portion of dill potatoes accompanied. Garlic and fenugreek were used in the marinade. The chops were juicy, fork-tender and spicy but not pungent enough to detract from the tasty meat. Fenugreek is a savory, slightly bitter herb that is available as leaves, seeds or as a spice. Methi refers to seeds.

Mixed seafood curry (\$9.95/\$15.95) was aromatic, zesty, poached seafood: mostly salmon, scallops and shrimp, in a light coconut curry that was snappy enough to be remembered.

Paneer ravioli (one size: \$15.95) was a giant pastry puff stuffed with paneer cheese, cauliflower,

mushrooms, spinach and cumin. Paneer is a fresh-made, non-melting curd cheese made without rennet, the coagulating agent. The serving was generous and the flavors intriguing. Cumin added an unexpected punch.

Mantra has relaxed its beverage menus as well. Cocktails and beer are available by the carafe and pitcher. The wine menu retains its strength with more than two dozen selections available by the glass. Full bottles are dominated by California and French selections. Since my last review in 2006, the composition of the list has been revised in favor of more affordable, less prestigious, yet very drinkable labels.

For dessert, the house-made kulfi (\$2.49) was a generous silky scoop of Indian ice cream flavored with cardamom over marinated cherries and blackberries.

The trio of custards (\$5.95) included a tea-infused chocolate brulee that was surprisingly astringent, a lush lick-the-spoon pot de crème, and a lip-smacking coconut caramel. A grand conclusion to a flavor-packed meal.

The lunch buffet (\$10.95) offers a myriad of curries, meats, fish, desserts, and vegetarian selections, Tuesday through Friday.

Many people repeat mantras in hopes of creating a spiritual change. Mantra the restaurant has certainly transformed itself.

Ashwani Dhawan has reimagined and breathed a new and exciting life into his fusion eatery. It's casual, reasonably priced fare with an executive chef who knows how to deliver. ■

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Lisa Young Hallenbeck is a Palo Alto school volunteer. She and her husband both grew up in Palo Alto, attending Green Gables and Van Auken/Los Niños, Jordan, and Palo Alto High School. Lisa is retired from Odwalla and her husband works in high tech product management.



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