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Be My Fest

The city's performing artists aren't taking a break this summer.

by [J. Cooper Robb](#)



Though many of the performing arts companies in town are winding up their seasons, the local performing arts community is busy year-round. This summer is no exception, with a number of must-see events appearing on the horizon.

The big thing this summer is festivals, beginning with the first annual **nEW Festival** (May 31-June 12) on the Avenue of the Arts. Featuring eight of Philadelphia's cutting-edge dance companies, nEW promises a bevy of exciting and unconventional dance. Included on the diverse program is the world premiere of Paule Turner/court's painstakingly developed new work **Touched**, Group Motion Dance Company's multimedia look at virtual reality in **Screens** and Headlong Dance Theater's spare collection of dances **Mixed Tape for a Bad Year**.

There's also a double bill featuring the experimental troupe Subcircle's solo piece **Somewhere Close to Now** and choreographer Lauren Peterson's bold new work **Security**, a complex mix of live performance, video and site-specific choreography that's said to address "our current obsession with tracking each other."

And if that isn't enough, you can explore the interaction between dance and film in Philadelphia Dance Projects' **Motion Pictures** or attend Dance Theater Lab, a workshop in which independent artists observe and critique each other's work.

Finally you can share in the creative process at DanceHouse, a peer-mentored program in which established artists such as Melanie Stewart collaborate with new artists like Elisa Lane in the development of new work.

The only multidisciplinary festival in the world showcasing art crafted from real-life experiences, the First **Person Festival of Memoir and Documentary Art** takes place here June 2 through 12. The festival features artists working in film as well as the visual, literary and performing arts. In addition there are a variety of workshops that give you the opportunity to immerse yourself in the craft of the memoir.

For theatergoers, First Person will present a double bill of one-man theatrical performances June 3 to 5. Performed as a series of monologues, Brian Lobel's **Ball** depicts a young man diagnosed with testicular cancer. The central character is awkward and a tad effeminate (picture the antithesis of the similarly stricken Lance Armstrong). Yet for all the character's insecurities, Lobel's irreverent and honest depiction of the young cancer victim shows that profound courage can be found in the most unlikely places.



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Also on the bill is the acclaimed storyteller/actor Robert Greygrass' **Ghostlands of Urban NdN**. Greygrass tells how he reclaimed his Lakota Indian roots by exploring the spiritual practices, language and history of his ancestors.

Just as the nEW and First Person festivals are entering their final days, along comes the **Philadelphia Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival** (June 9-19). The brainchild of managing director Bill Esher and artistic director Mathew Cloran, the festival offers more gay and lesbian drama in a mere 10 days than the major companies stage in an entire season.

Boasting six shows and a staged reading, the festival opens with the world premiere of Cherry Hill natives Joseph and David Zellnik's musical **Yank!** A World War II buddy story, *Yank!* focuses on an Army private and war correspondent who fall in love during basic training.

Also scheduled is the family drama **Kilt, 'Round Midnight**, a sexy mystery with music and puppets; **Lounge-zilla** from the nationally recognized comedy duo the Oops Guys; the one-man show **Like a Dog on Linoleum** from *Will & Grace*'s Leslie Jordan; the 15th-anniversary production of Michael Ogborn's extraordinarily poignant musical response to the AIDS epidemic *C'est La Guerre*; and a staged reading of the new one-act musical **Fags and Cellphones**.

If dance, real-world experiences and gay theater aren't your thing, you can enjoy the classics at the **Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival**. After a few lean artistic summers, the festival rebounded last year with a series of strong productions. This year PSF presents four adult productions and the kids' show **The Little Mermaid**.

Featuring an impressive lineup of Broadway, national and local talent, the festival kicks off with Moliere's comedy **The Imaginary Invalid** (June 8-July 3). The Bard is represented with **Henry IV, Part I** (June 22-July 10) in a production starring Chicago Shakespeare Festival actor Scott Parkinson and featuring Barrymore Award winner Ian Merrill Peakes.

Yet another Barrymore winner, Greg Wood inhabits the role of dapper adventurer Phileas Fogg in a stage adaptation of Jules Verne's **Around the World in 80 Days** (July 13-Aug. 7). Finally, Drama Desk Award recipient Ken Jennings plays Shylock in Shakespeare's **The Merchant of Venice** (July 20-Aug. 7).

More than 25 years after it initially caused a sensation, the Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice musical **Evita** is embarking on a national tour. It'll stop by the Academy of Music for a brief run (June 21-26). The musical's success depends greatly on who plays the three main characters. The show's original director Hal Prince is reportedly in charge of casting the production. Prince has a great eye for talent.

In New Jersey the enormously successful Lenape Regional Arts Center presents its popular summer series. In a coup for any regional theater, Lenape will present the world premiere of composer Frank Wildhorn's new musical **Waiting for the Moon** (July 16-31). A jazz age musical of speakeasies, champagne and glamour from the composer of *Jekyll & Hyde*, Wildhorn's latest focuses on F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, a couple so attractive they fell in love with themselves.

In August Lenape will try to accomplish what Brat Productions and Tapestry Theatre could not, which is to put on a production of **Grease** the show's licensing agent Samuel French doesn't object to. Helmed by the talented Jen Childs, Lenape's production (Aug. 20-Sept. 11) will include four songs from the film version, which gives you a chance to hear such gems as "Hopelessly Devoted to You" and "You're the One That I Want" in addition to the show's original score.

nEW Festival

Tues., May 31-Sun., June 12. \$12-\$15. Arts Bank, Broad and South sts. 215.359.7775.
www.newfestival.net

First Person Festival of Memoir and Documentary Art

Fri., June 3-Sun., June 5, 8pm. \$15. Performance Garage, 1515 Brandywine St.
215.569.9700. www.firstpersonfestival.org

Philadelphia Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival

Thurs., June 9-Sun., June 19. \$15. Various venues. 215.922.1122.
www.philagaylesbiantheatrefest.org

Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival

Wed., June 8-Sun., Aug. 7. \$24-\$37. 2755 Station Ave., Center Valley. 610.282.WILL.
www.pashakespeare.org

Evita

Tues., June 21-Sun., June 26. \$27.50-\$77.50. Academy of Music, Broad and Locust sts. 215.893.1999. www.kimmelcenter.org

Waiting for the Moon

Sat., July 16-Sun., July 31. \$35-\$50. Lenape Regional Performing Arts Center, 130 Tomlinson Mill Rd., Marlton, N.J. 856.983.3366. www.sjtheater.com

Grease

Wed., Aug. 20-Sun., Sept. 11. \$35-\$50. Lenape Regional Performing Arts Center, 130 Tomlinson Mill Rd., Marlton, N.J. 856.983.3366. www.sjtheater.com

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