

## Evanston celebrates its arts history

### Backstage Evanston Ethel M. Barber Theater

30 Arts Circle Drive, Northwestern University, Evanston

3-6 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 29

\$20 in advance, \$25 at the door, \$10 discounted rate for students with I.D.

A \$20 voucher is given with each full price ticket. (Not with the student ticket.)

(847) 448-8260; [backstageevanston.com](http://backstageevanston.com)

The arts have thrived in Evanston for decades. Fifteen of the city's finest theater, dance and music companies will show why during the fourth annual Backstage Evanston, Sunday, Sept. 29 at the Ethel M. Barber Theater.

Each group will present a five-minute performance and offer special deals available that day only. Everyone who pays full price for a ticket (\$20 in advance, \$25 at the door) will get a \$20 voucher that they can use to purchase these special deals.

"Because it's the 150th anniversary in Evanston, we wanted to celebrate the history of the performing arts in town," said producer Penny Rotheiser, a member of the Arts & Business Committee of the Evanston Arts Council, which produces the event with the City of Evanston. "We're going to start the show with a special historical photo montage featuring all of the groups. In-between performances, we're going to have anecdotal information about some of the groups."

The oldest organization that will perform at Backstage Evanston is the North Shore Choral Society, which was founded in 1936 in Winnetka and migrated to Evanston in 1967. Karen Rigotti, who is general manager of the Choral Society, has been singing with the group since 1987. It consists of 140 singers selected by audition. They perform three concerts annually, the next on Nov. 17.

"We have generations of people who sing — parents and their kids," Rigotti reported.

For Backstage Evanston, about 40 chorus members will perform, "The Lord is My Shepherd," Howard Goodall's setting of the 23rd psalm. "It's actually well known because it's the theme from an old BBC TV series, 'The Vicar of Dibley,'" Rigotti noted.

Their voucher deal will be two tickets for either of the chorus's first two concerts.

Penelope Sachs has been a violist with the Evanston Symphony Orchestra for 20 years. That's hardly a record for the group that was started in 1945 and currently has around 80 players. "We had a player last year who was celebrating her 50th year with the orchestra," Sachs noted.

Sachs thinks she knows why people stay with the orchestra so long. "We all love symphonic music," she explained. "When you play it well, the feeling of what you can achieve jointly is really incredible."

There won't be room on the stage for the entire group so a cellist will perform a solo from "The Carnival of the Animals," by Saint-Saens, which the symphony will perform at its Nov. 10 concert. The Symphony will offer a single ticket for any seat at that concert or its holiday concert for each voucher.

The Savoyaires, a company that produces one Gilbert and Sullivan Operetta each year, was founded in 1964 in Skokie. It moved to Evanston in 1994. Kingsley Day, who joined the group in 1998, will play Ko-Ko in “The Mikado,” Oct. 11-20.

“Every year, there’s about 30 onstage and 30 in the orchestra,” Day noted. He added that with the people behind the scenes, “It’s close to 100 people involved every year, and all on a volunteer basis. Even the chorus has to audition.”

A couple of duets from “The Mikado” will be performed at Backstage Evanston, including one featuring Day’s character. The voucher can be used for two middle price range tickets to “The Mikado.” “It’s better than a two-for-one deal,” Day said.

“Evanston is good at keeping not-for-profit organizations around,” said Jennifer Avery, artistic director of Next Theatre Company, which was founded in 1981. She is starting her fourth season leading the company.

Next will perform a scene from the first show of its upcoming season, “Compulsion” by Rinne Groff. “This is a really amazing play, based on a true story,” Avery related. “It’s about a man who dedicated his life to ‘The Diary of Anne Frank.’”

A \$20 voucher will get audience members one preview ticket to any of the performances. Purchase \$80 in vouchers and you get a season subscription. For \$40 in vouchers, you get 2 tickets to “Compulsion.”

The Evanston Dance Ensemble, which was founded in 1997, will perform its 1999 work, “Hoedown.” “It’s a theatrical ballet — a little slice of Americana,” said Bea Rashid, founder of the Ensemble and co-artistic director with Christina Ernst. Ten dancers will perform.

Vouchers will be good for two tickets to the company’s next production.

Also performing at Backstage Evanston are Actors Gymnasium, CoCoDaCo, Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre, Light Opera Works, The Musical Offering, Music Institute of Chicago, Northwestern University’s Theatre and Interpretation Center, Piccolo Theatre, Piven Theatre Workshop and Renovo String Orchestra.

Rotheiser concluded, “We’re trying to celebrate the fact that we’ve had all these wonderful groups for a long time and that we’re still encouraging new ones.”

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