

# Safer Spaces

Arts groups look to unusual venues and outdoor locations for performances.

BY DINA HERNANDEZ

“Nothing replaces live performances,” Opera Orlando’s Gabe Preisser says. “There’s something magical about being in the theater, experiencing the performance in real time.”

There’s also something magical about the innovations of Orlando Opera, Central Florida Community Arts and many other performing-arts groups that have made it possible for their supporters to return to in-person performances.

For example, Opera Orlando’s production of *Death of Ivan Ilych*, slated for Friday and Sunday, February 19 and 21, is a world premiere composed by the Sarasota Opera’s John Young, a former singer who now composes and conducts. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. both nights.

The libretto is by Alan Olejniczak, playwright-in-residence with The Proscenium, an online theater company based in Hong Kong, and musicians are from Orlando-based Altery Chamber Orchestra.

Part of the opera’s “On the Town” series, *Death of Ivan Ilych* will be performed in the Orlando Museum of Art’s Grand Gallery Hall, a space that accommodates a socially distanced audience of just 75 people.

That intimacy, however, creates an immersive experience for the audience — which is fitting for an adaptation of Leo Tolstoy’s story of a dying man reflecting on whether he had lived his life well.

“I know the title sounds like a downer, but it’s more a study of life. When Ivan faces his own mortality, he faces how he lived and how he should have lived,” says Preisser, Opera Orlando executive director. “It’s a universal message — something we all face.”

Young, in fact, already faced his own mortality head on — which is why the story undoubtedly has special meaning to him. The composer’s singing career was ended after he won a battle with cancer but emerged with his voice damaged. Talent and determination enabled him to redirect his career.

This theater-in-the-round production features Sean C. Stork as Ivan and Adriana Nieves as his wife, Praskovya. Opera Orlando’s production is in partnership with Chicago’s Thompson Street Opera Company. The ticket price includes drinks and appetizers, and a post-performance dessert reception.

The Orlando Museum of Art is located at 2416 North Mills Avenue, Orlando. Check [operaorlando.com](http://operaorlando.com) for ticket prices or call 407.512.1900.

**(Facing page)** Opera Orlando’s production of *Death of Ivan Ilych* is a world premiere composed by John Young of the Sarasota Opera with a libretto by Alan Olejniczak, artist-in-residence at an online theater company. The opera features Sean C. Stork as Ivan and Adriana Nieves as his wife, Praskovya. In addition, the CFCArts Big Band (right) will perform *A Tribute to Jazz: Celebrating Black History Month* at the Apopka Amphitheater, which can seat 1,500 social distanced people.



Open-air performances are another welcome option as COVID-19 continues to impact all aspects of life. As a result, Central Florida Community Arts (CFCArts) is staging an upcoming concert outdoors.

The CFCArts Big Band will perform *A Tribute to Jazz: Celebrating Black History Month* on Saturday, February 27 at the Apopka Amphitheater, which can safely seat 1,500 people with additional space on the expansive lawn. Just bring a blanket or folding chair, says the organization’s Senior Director of Programs Terrance Hunter. Showtime is at 3 p.m.

Before the Civil Rights movement, Black musicians toured on what was dubbed the “Chitlin Circuit,” touring the South with gigs in nightclubs that locally included the Club Eaton in Eatonville and South Street Casino in Orlando’s Parramore district. These venues hosted legends such as Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Ella Fitzgerald and B.B. King.

The concert setlist will pay homage through music, dance and spoken word to the musicians and audiences who endured that era. In addition, Hunter says, “The tradition of outdoor jazz concerts has kind of gone away. To be able to revive some of that while honoring our history is very meaningful to me.”

Led by John Almeida and Daniel Maldonado, the 30-member Big Band plans a program that includes works by Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie and Stevie Wonder.

The Apopka Amphitheater is located at 3710 Jason Dwelley Parkway, Apopka. Check [cfcarts.com](http://cfcarts.com) for ticket prices or call 407.937.1800. **OA**