



ARTS & CULTURAL ALLIANCE  
OF SARASOTA COUNTY

2023-2024

# Arts & Culture

A GUIDE TO  
FLORIDA'S CULTURAL COAST

# Welcome

to Sarasota County, Florida's Cultural Coast!

**N**ESTLED along Florida's picturesque Gulf Coast, Sarasota County stands as a symbolic bond connecting natural beauty and artistic excellence.

With its pristine beaches, lush landscapes, and a rich tapestry of cultural offerings, this enchanting region has evolved into a thriving hub for arts and culture enthusiasts. From world-class museums to open-air performances, Sarasota County's arts scene is a



Above: a walkway at Selby Gardens' downtown campus. Left: Urbanite Theatre presents new works in its space downtown.

About the cover: Zach Gilliland's *Ascension*, stainless steel and automotive paint. Photo by Federico Torres

captivating journey through creativity and imagination.

Since the early 20th century, visionaries like John Ringling and others fostered an environment that attracted thousands of artists, writers and performers, making

Sarasota County a haven for creative pursuits. As fine art institutions began to form and artists organized to establish schools and colonies, Sarasota County solidified its reputation as a cultural hotspot for future generations.

Today, Sarasota County stands firmly on its artistic origins. Its dynamic arts scene encompasses a wide range of disciplines including visual arts, theater performances, concert music and dance. With a dedication to its cultural identity and embracing contemporary innovations, there is truly something for everyone on Florida's Cultural Coast.

The Miro Quartet, performing for the Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota season.



For over 35 years, the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County has served as a vital advocate for the arts throughout the region, aiming to cultivate an arts-powered economy, promote well-being through artistic engagement, and ensure widespread access to arts education. We hope this guide will serve not only as informational, but inspirational as well. To learn more about all of the arts and cultural happenings in Sarasota County, please visit **[SarasotaArts.org](https://SarasotaArts.org)**.

*Sincerely,*

The Arts and Cultural  
Alliance of Sarasota County

**CATCH  
THIS**  
Don't miss  
out this  
season!

# Theater



Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe's holiday celebration, *Joyful! Joyful!*

## Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe

Sarasota is proud to be home to one of the nation's most successful Black theater companies, where you can see four mainstage shows each season, along with a holiday entertainment. Plus, there are special musical performances and artist showcases, often featuring rising talents. [westcoast-blacktheatre.org](http://westcoast-blacktheatre.org)

## Asolo Rep Rotating Plays

There aren't many regional theaters where you can catch three different Equity productions within just a week or so. At Asolo Rep, you can. During the 2024 season, if you're around in say, late March, you can see the Alley Theatre world premiere production of *Born with Teeth* (about Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe), Lynn Nottage's story of forbidden romance, *Intimate Apparel*, and a new version of the thriller *Dial 'M' for Murder*. [asolarep.org](http://asolarep.org).

## FST Improv

If you're an improv fan, you probably make time to visit a troupe wherever you travel. Florida Studio Theatre has its own group of funsters, who regularly present made-up-in-the-moment comedy every Saturday night (and sometimes Fridays) in the company's Court Cabaret. [floridastudio-theatre.org](http://floridastudio-theatre.org)



FST Improv works hard to entertain audiences.

## Venice Theatre

VT, now more than 70 years old, is, per capita, the largest community theater in the country, with an operating budget of almost \$4 million, a professional staff and a beloved spot in the history of Venice, Florida. [venicetheatre.org](http://venicetheatre.org)



A recent production of *Godspell* at The Sarasota Players.

For more information about current arts and cultural happenings, scan this:



# MEET THE ARTIST

## Raleigh Mosely II



**Musical theater performer, recording artist, often working with Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe**

**Hometown:**  
Miami, Florida

**Years in practice:** 15

**What do you love most about what you do?**

“Being able to connect to characters and tell stories that truly consider the human experience. Every character I get to play reveals something about myself to me, not only as a performer but also as a human experiencing the rollercoaster that is life.”

**What is your favorite thing about arts and culture in Sarasota County?**

“Other than Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe? Two things: the community among the artists from all areas of art, and the relatively quick and genuine connection and support I experience from other artists and organizations and the financial support from the residents. And the weather usually permits dope outside events to enjoy the beautiful city along with the art. Which leads to my second thing, because the residents are always at these events. They show up.”

**If you could tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?**

“I’m always thinking that this is the life I’m supposed to be living, and going back and trying to change it means that I may have to replace all the memories I’ve made up until now. I’d tell my younger self that you’re doing great and to keep going. And to never stop stretching!”

**For tourists, what is one art experience in Sarasota County that you feel is a must?**

“This may seem biased, but seeing a show at WBTT. All the shows are excellent, but seeing a Nate Jacobs original will honestly lift you off the ground. I’d also include the Hermitage Artist Retreat and the events they put on—literally a free event for every category of art lover, from leading artists in said category.”

## Van Wezel Broadway Season

The 2023-24 theater season at our performing arts hall is bigger than ever, with six Tony Award-winning shows and seven Van Wezel premieres. Among them: *The Cher Show, Ain't Too Proud—The Life and Times of the Temptations, Hadestown*, and, at long last, the megahit *Hamilton*. [vanwezel.org](http://vanwezel.org)



Tony-winning Best Musical *Hadestown* comes to the Van Wezel Jan. 30-Feb. 4, 2024.



Morgan Lavenstein and Jake Fallon in an Urbanite Theatre production of *The Burdens*.

Sheldon Rhoden performing as the late singer Marvin Gaye, at WBTT.

# Dance

For more information about current arts and cultural happenings, scan this:



## The Sarasota Ballet

Sarasota's own ballet company is headed to London in June 2024, for its first-ever international tour, during a week's residency at the Royal Opera House. There, the dancers will perform works choreographed by Sir Frederick Ashton—something of a specialty for the ensemble. But you don't have to travel to see similar performances; the ballet offers several Ashton pieces this season here at home, from his *Dante Sonata* to his *Sinfonietta*. [sarasotaballet.org](http://sarasotaballet.org)

Sarasota Contemporary Dance presents four mainstage performances each season, often collaborating with other arts groups. The company also offers classes and an in-studio series.



## MEET THE ARTIST

### Jennifer Hackbarth



The Sarasota Ballet principal dancer

**Hometown:**  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**Years in practice:**  
began professionally at 17, now for eight years

**What is your favorite thing about arts and culture in Sarasota County?**

“From my first moments, I felt the vibrancy of the arts and

culture here. Sarasota is filled with opportunities to experience, from the Ringling Museum to the ballet to the grandeur of nature at the beaches or nature preserves.”

**What are you looking forward to most this season?**

“Performing the exciting repertoire with the ballet in my first season here. I'm looking forward to getting to know my new ballet family members, and to further exploring Sarasota as I settle in my new home.”

**How has being involved in the arts changed your life?**

“The global community of people it has gathered into my life. Starting at 8, when I attended my first ballet summer intensive, I began meeting dancers from around the world. As I grew older and attended international competitions and schools, my community expanded even further. To this day, my closest friends and mentors are all from different states, countries and continents.”

**For tourists, what is one art experience in Sarasota County that you feel is a must?**

“Although The Sarasota Ballet performs in many beautiful theaters, it was the incredible Mertz Theatre where I had the opportunity to see and step out on its stage, leaving me with a sense of wonder and awe. The Dunfermline Opera House theater and stage in Scotland was moved 4,000 miles across the ocean and rebuilt here; now it offers the tourist the grace and beauty of stepping back in time.”



# Visual Arts

## The Ringling

The Ringling remains a haven for locals and visitors alike, with its permanent collections, changing exhibits, Asian art center, lively programs in the Historic Asolo Theater and more. Plus, there's a day each week to take in the art museum, bayfront gardens and Kotler-Coville glass art pavilion absolutely free. Every Monday; admission prices still apply to the Ringling mansion and circus museum. [ringling.org](http://ringling.org)



The Kotler-Coville Glass Pavilion at The Ringling.

The Sarasota Art Museum.



## Sarasota Art Museum of Ringling College

This contemporary art museum in the restored old Sarasota High building welcomes visitors each second Sunday for free, offering not only the exhibitions on display but music performances and art-making activities designed for all ages. [sarasotaartmuseum.org](http://sarasotaartmuseum.org)

# MEET THE ARTIST

## Osa Atoé

**Studio potter,  
Pottery by Osa**

**Hometown:**  
Lorton, Virginia

**Years in practice:** 10

### **What do you love most about what you do?**

“Creative freedom and flexibility. I absolutely love clay—just the material in and of itself—and I love using it to share my perspective and connect with people.”

### **What is your favorite thing about arts and culture in Sarasota County?**

“I love that art and culture are everywhere, not just in museums and galleries. Many of my neighbors have their own studios and make art from home. I’ve been invited to dinner only to be told that every tile inside the lanai was handmade, or every painting in the house was painted by the host.”

### **How has being involved in the arts changed your life?**

“Before making pottery, I was a musician, and I’ve been involved in the arts my entire life, so it’s difficult to say how it’s changed me. I can’t imagine life without creativity. Each medium I’ve been involved with helped me form my sense of identity and helped build confidence. Becoming a potter created a path for me to be an entrepreneur, which has been incredibly empowering.”

### **For tourists, what is one art experience in Sarasota County that you feel is a must?**

“Opening night at Art Center Sarasota. If you want to get a feel for the local creative community, including student work, show up at a Thursday evening art opening at ACS.”



## Sarasota Studio Artists Association

On the second Saturday of most months of the year, the artists banding together under this umbrella open their studios, located all over town, to art lovers. The association includes several collectives, like the Creative Liberties Artist Studios & Gallery on Apricot Avenue, and its website, [srqartists.com](http://srqartists.com), boasts an interactive map making it easy for you to find your way to your favorites.

*Frida #10* by Sarasota Studio Artists Association member Beck Lane.



# Visual Arts

Seven spaces present art of all kinds at the Galleries of Ringling College campus.

## Art Galleries

From Art Center Sarasota to photographer Clyde Butcher's St. Armands Circle gallery to State of the Art Gallery downtown and the Ringling College campus, there are plentiful opportunities for you to view a wide range of art, absolutely free—unless, of course, you fall in love and decide to make a purchase.

For more information about current arts and cultural happenings, scan this:



# CATCH THIS

## Artistic Communities

Hermitage Artist Retreat Fellows  
Terry Guest and Lady Jess.



### The Hermitage Artist Retreat

This retreat on Manasota Key's beachfront is well worth a visit when it presents its visiting artists working in theater, music and visual arts in programs highlighting their work. But the retreat also partners with other arts groups all over the county to offer programs elsewhere, too—often with just a \$5 registration fee. [hermitageartistretreat.org](http://hermitageartistretreat.org)

### Fogartyville and WSLR

For folks who really love a true listening room, downtown's Fogartyville Community Media & Art Center is the place to be. Music concerts ranging from folk to blues to jazz and more, but also other special events in the cozy space. It's tied to 96.5 WSLR, Sarasota community radio; tune in. [wslr.org/fogartyville](http://wslr.org/fogartyville)

## MEET THE ARTIST

### Maria Schaedler-Luera

Co-founder/  
owner of  
Atomica Arts,  
which offers  
arts integra-  
tion and  
education  
consulting, applied  
theater  
workshops  
and more



Hometown: Curitiba, Brazil

Years in practice: 25-plus

#### What do you love most about what you do?

"Witnessing the transformative power of the arts in connecting people across cultures. I get immense joy from observing personal growth through theater and mindfulness."

#### What is your favorite thing about arts and culture in Sarasota County?

"One of my favorites is the way this community embraces cross-cultural engagement and creativity. From venues like the Van Wezel to the innovative performances at CreArte Latino, which offers theater experiences in Spanish, and shows at Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, Asolo Rep, Florida Studio Theatre, The Players and Venice Theatre, there's a fusion of artistic disciplines that allows individuals from various backgrounds to come together and create something meaningful."

#### How has being involved in the arts changed your life?

"It's reshaped my life, illuminating that I am the protagonist of my own story. That entails an active commitment to engagement, and revolves around nurturing self-awareness."

#### If you could tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?

"To embrace every opportunity for growth, even when it requires stepping out of your comfort zone."

## MEET THE ARTIST



**Ryan Weston**

**Head coach of acrobatics and in charge of program development for Sailor Circus Academy at the Circus Arts Conservatory**

**Hometown:** Pocatello, Idaho (“the center of the universe!”)

**Years in practice:** “I’ve been involved in acrobatics since I was a fetus. I was an alternate for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, an eight-time National Trampoline Champion, USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame inductee and Cirque Du Soleil performer for 15 years. I’ve been coaching for over 25.”

**What do you love most about what you do?**

“Being able to help the kids at Sailor Circus see all the potential they have. I love seeing them work hard to reach their goals physically, mentally and emotionally. I believe the most important job I have as a coach and mentor is to build confidence. I want to help build amazing circus superstars and amazing superstar humans!”

**What are you looking forward to most this season?**

“Seeing how much our kids are going to improve and grow. We’re implementing quantitative, measurable goals for the kids. We want them to set and work towards short-term and long-term goals.”

**If you could tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?**

“Be sure and enjoy the moments performing onstage more. Trust my instincts more and not worry so much about what others think. I would also say, not to be afraid of failure.”

**For tourists, what is one arts experience in Sarasota County that you feel is a must?**

“Well, of course I would say go see the circus! Circus Sarasota is amazing, and the shows we produce at Sailor Circus as well. And for sure go to the Ringling Museum; it’s one of my favorites.”

**CATCH THIS**

## Cultural Destinations



Passengers enroute between Selby Gardens’ two campuses watch a dolphin leap.

### Set Sail with Selby Gardens

What’s better than visiting one of Selby’s beautiful sites, downtown or at Osprey’s Historic Spanish Point? That would be visiting both in one day, with a boat trip between the two that includes plenty of info about their history and nature, plus a box lunch. If you have a full day for the experience, you can’t beat it. [selby.org](http://selby.org)



Selby Gardens’ Historic Spanish Point campus.

## Kayaking Tours with Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium

These tours, which offer basic kayaking instructions, all equipment and trained educators who can point out all sort of flora and fauna along our shores, fill up fast, September through May. So if you're interested, sign up at least 48 hours ahead of the time you hope to go. [mote.org](http://mote.org)

For more information  
about current arts and  
cultural happenings,  
scan this:



# Music

CATCH  
THIS



Steph Davis of Sarasota's Modern Marimba, which performs several concerts a year, often for free.

## The Venice Symphony

The symphony celebrates its 50th anniversary this season, with a seven-concert season at the Venice Performing Arts Center. Music director Troy Quinn and the orchestra welcome such guest artists as Andrew Bain, Dashon Burton and Deanna Breiwick, with a special event in February bringing Michael Feinstein to the stage as well.

[thevenicesymphony.org](http://thevenicesymphony.org)

## Monday Night Jazz Cabaret Series

The Jazz Club of Sarasota and Florida Studio Theatre team up to present this series, which offers all that jazz served up in the cozy atmosphere of the Court Cabaret. Full bar and dinner menu available, too.

[jazzclubsarasota.org](http://jazzclubsarasota.org)

For more information about current arts and cultural happenings, scan this:



Swing into jazz at FST.

# MEET THE ARTIST

## Sarasota Opera

Like Asolo Rep, at the historic Sarasota Opera House downtown, opera aficionados can revel in more than one performance during a short time. For example, *Carmen* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* can both be heard in late February or early March 2024, or you can choose *Luisa Miller* and *Deceit Outwitted* in mid-March. It's a win-win. [sarasotopera.org](http://sarasotopera.org)

## Gulf Coast Banjo Society

There's something about a banjo that raises your spirits, and when a whole group of banjo players gets together, that feeling is multiplied. Especially if you listen to them at Venice's tucked-away old-Florida escape, Snook Haven, where the fried gator bites, fried green tomatoes and pulled pork tacos on the lunch menu add to the flavor. Every Thursday, October-May, from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.; free. [snookhaven.com](http://snookhaven.com)



Banjo players and banjo lovers unite at Snook Haven.

## Natalie Helm



**Principal cello of the Sarasota Orchestra and founder/executive director of Upward Notes, Inc.**

**Hometown:** Louisville, Kentucky

### What do you love most about what you do?

"The constant growth and challenge that come with being an artist. If you're comfortable, it usually means you're not pushing the boundaries of your technique or connection to your art form."

### What is your favorite thing about arts and culture in Sarasota County?

"The arts and culture scene is thriving! My favorite aspect is when they begin collaborating. There is so much support for each organization, and when you begin combining those forces, the results are outstanding."

### What are you looking forward to most this season?

"This season is the Sarasota Orchestra's 75th anniversary, and our special guests are out of this world on each of the Masterworks Series concerts."

### For tourists, what is one art experience in Sarasota County that you feel is a must?

"Attend a Sarasota Orchestra concert!"

# Music

The Sarasota Orchestra, celebrating its 75th anniversary this season, presents several different concert series.

For more information about current arts and cultural happenings, scan this:



# Celebrating Patriotism

Art installations, concerts and more have helped to make Patriot Plaza a meaningful spot to honor veterans.



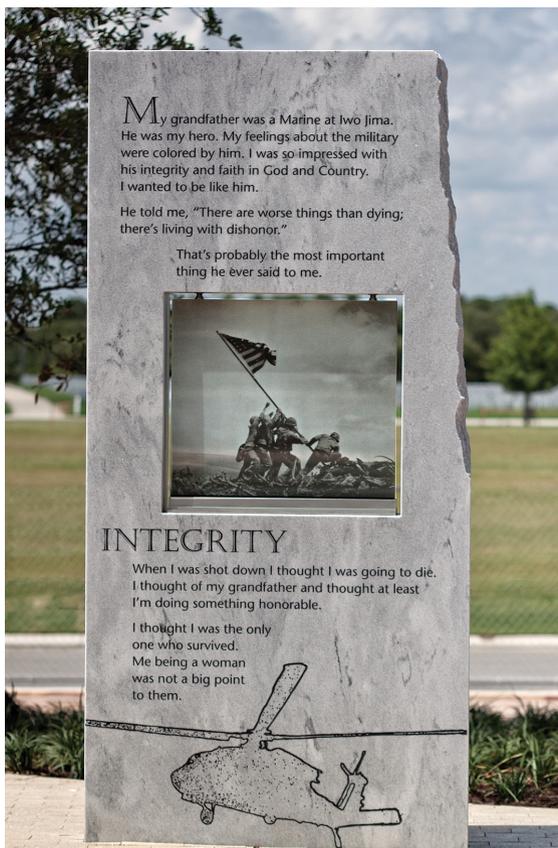
To the left: Patriot Plaza at the Sarasota National Cemetery. Below: *Testimonies* by Larry Kirkland.

**N**EARLY 10 years ago, Patriot Plaza, at Sarasota National Cemetery, was dedicated as a component of this

final resting place for thousands of veterans and family members, on State Road 72 four miles east of I-75. In 2024, the Plaza will mark its 10th anniversary.

The Plaza is not only historic, in that it's the first ever project of its complexity to be a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' National Cemetery Administration and privately funded philanthropy, thanks to Sarasota-based The Patterson Foundation. (The Foundation has provided \$12 million for its creation and continuing care.) It's also a place where visitors (some 73,000 so far, including many students grades 4-12 bused there with the Foundation's support) can gather to pay tribute and honor the dead.

The heart of the Plaza is home to a 2,800-seat ceremonial amphitheater,



*Home*, featuring eagles in their nests, by Ann Hirsch



complete with a rostrum capable of presenting a 55-piece orchestra for patriotic concerts and an 80-foot-tall flagpole for the proud display of Old Glory. The plaza also has walkways and gathering areas, a 20,800-square-

foot glass covering, and six commissioned pieces of art designed to honor veterans, inspire patriotism and embrace freedom.

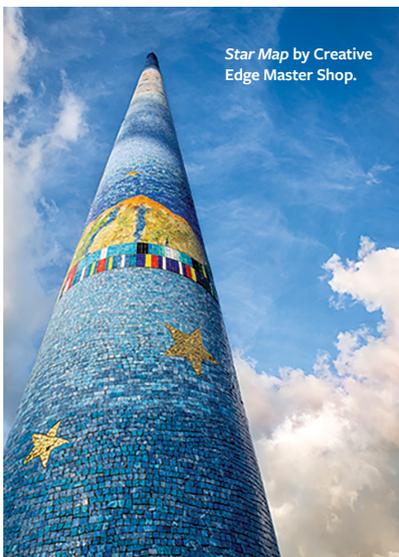
Those six art installations consist of *Testimonies* by Larry Kirkland, 16 white marble tablets displaying engravings and photographs; *Witness to Mission*, 22 white marble plinths featuring historic photographs from the Civil War on to today, by Kirkland and Kenny Irby; *Night to Day, Here and Away*, a rostrum mural by Ellen Driscoll; *Guardian Eagles*, two stately bronze eagles designed by Pablo Eduardo; *Home*, featuring eagles in their

nests, by Ann Hirsch; and a *Star Map* piece fabricated by Creative Edge Master Shop.

Taken altogether, the artwork, the flag and the overall design of the Plaza make it a fitting and welcoming place for veterans and their families to mark the contributions and sacrifices made for the United States.

Patriot Plaza is open daily from sunrise to sunset, and admission is free. There are also weekly tours each Tuesday at 10 a.m., except for federal holidays. Patriot Plaza Guides are trained in collaboration with the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County. To schedule a group or school tour, contact [patriotplaza@sarasotaarts.org](mailto:patriotplaza@sarasotaarts.org).

Also, the Patterson Foundation is exploring ways to mark the 10-year anniversary. Details still to come, but the community is promised opportunities to come together to celebrate Patriot Plaza and those it was built to honor. For more information on the Plaza's creation, purpose and events, visit [thepattersonfoundation.org](http://thepattersonfoundation.org) and click on Current Initiatives.



*Star Map* by Creative Edge Master Shop.

# SUPPORT THE ARTS!

Become a member of  
the Arts Alliance.

The Arts and Cultural Alliance is the leading advocate for arts and culture in Sarasota County and Florida's Cultural Coast. Our primary goals include bolstering our arts-powered economy, promoting health & wellness to nurture our artists and audiences, and advancing arts education & community engagement to ensure accessibility to arts and culture.

Memberships available for organizations,  
businesses, artists and individuals.

Scan to explore  
membership!



[sarasotaarts.org](http://sarasotaarts.org)



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