

BY RICK PENDER

While the common wisdom about 2002 is that it's been a down year in the performing arts — it's surely been a tough year to sell tickets — there's lots of evidence by local theaters that good work and intriguing shows can overcome the trend. During 2002 Cincinnati stages saw works that weren't simply familiar fare. It was a rare chance to see two plays by a contemporary writer, when the **CINCINNATI PLAYHOUSE IN THE PARK** staged Carter Lewis' *Men on the Take*, the 2002 Rosenthal Prize winner, while **ENSEMBLE THEATRE OF CINCINNATI** (ETC) offered the local premiere of his *Women Who Steal*. In September at ETC we saw the first staging outside New York City of Anne Nelson's moving *The Guys*, a tribute to firefighters lost at the World Trade Center. Perhaps the year's most memorable production was Mia McCullough's *Chagrin Falls* by the **CINCINNATI SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL** (CSF). The Chicago pre-

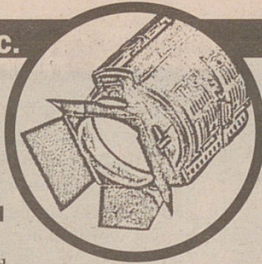
miere of McCullough's powerful play, about an Oklahoma town where death is the principal industry, won the national 2002 M. Elizabeth Osborn Award from the American Theatre Critics Association for an up-and-coming playwright; CSF gave the young playwright's script its second production, earning multiple Cincinnati Entertainment Awards in November for their effort, including the year's best production. Other memorable productions of new works during the past 12 months have included CSF's *The Beard of Avon*, *Jesus Hopped the "A" Train* and *The Gimmick* (which will be reprised in January); ETC's *Cowgirls* and *Syncopation*; Stage First Cincinnati's *Alexander the Great*; and the Cincinnati Playhouse's *Dirty Blonde* and *Barbara's Blue Kitchen*. Even **BROADWAY IN CINCINNATI** has gotten in on the act with a few new shows (as opposed to rereads and revivals): In October the Aronoff Center was one of the first national stops for *The Producers*, 2001 winner of more Tony Awards than any other Broadway musical, and this week we're watching the 2000 Tony winner for best musical, *Contact* (see review, page 48). The year began with an unusual partnership when Broadway in Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Playhouse teamed up to present the national tour of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, a show some thought would never play in Cincinnati. But its three-week run sold out the Aronoff's Jarson-Kaplan Theater (and warranted a return one-week engagement over the summer in the big hall at the Aronoff) and garnered praise for its frankness and life-affirming attitudes about a generally avoided subject. ... Behind the scenes, several

theaters have struggled this season. **STAGE FIRST CINCINNATI** announced last spring that it would cease operations after four seasons; only when artistic director Nicholas Korn found a last-minute sponsor willing to breathe the organization back to life was he able to assemble a 2002-03 season. Cincinnati

Shakespeare Festival faced an even bigger challenge when its bold 2002-03 season failed to sell enough tickets to sustain operations. In mid-November, CSF announced that its founding artistic director, the energetic and innovative **JASSON MINADAKIS**, will step down at year's end after nine seasons to be replaced by another founder, actor/director **NICK ROSE**. The balance of CSF's commendable and socially relevant season — which was to include *Hamlet* and its Tom Stoppard doppelganger, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; Martin Sherman's 1980 Tony

winner, the gay-themed *Bent*; and yet another work on racial themes, *In the Blood* by Suzan-Lori Parks (winner of the 2002 Pulitzer Prize) — has been scrapped for more audience-friendly fare, including two comedies by Shakespeare and one by Molière. Rose and his new leadership team have begun to map out CSF's 10th season with an emphasis on classic work and a return to the acting company CSF used in its early days. There's hope that some of the company's former performers will return for guest appearances. ... One other sad result of CSF's difficulties is that top-notch designer **WILL TURBYNE** will leave the staff, although he plans to stay in town and seek other opportunities, including doing some contract work with CSF. His designs for CSF productions have been remarkable, elevating them well above previous amateurish efforts. Turbyne's impact at CSF is comparable to the results **BRIAN C. MEHRING** has achieved in several seasons at ETC, where scenic design was also once a weak point. Mehring's designs (superbly executed by technical director **CHAD G. ENGELMAN**) make ETC's shows a pleasure to watch — from the musty walk-up 1912 dance studio in *Syncopation* to *Cowgirls*' cheesy Country bar to the innovative, multiple-imaged set using computer projections for *Praying for Rain*. The Cincinnati Playhouse is often and appropriately praised for its marvelous sets, but that sizeable theater has substantial resources to work such magic. CSF and ETC have been doing it on meager, shoestring budgets and still making it look excellent — thanks to the brilliance of Turbyne and Mehring.

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## THE YEAR



**Designer Will Turbyne is leaving his full-time position at CSF but will stay in town to work.**

PHOTO: JYMI BOLDEN

## HOLIDAY

The Hamiltonian Hotel, One Riverfront Plaza, Hamilton. 513-896-6200, ext. 121 or [www.mayhemmystery.com](http://www.mayhemmystery.com).

**HILLFOREST HOUSE MUSEUM** — See the museum in Victorian holiday décor as you tour the facility for the Victorian Christmas Exhibit, sponsored by American Electric Power of Lawrenceburg, Ind. While you're in the neighborhood, check out Hillforest's Museum Store for everything from old-fashioned toys to jewelry. 1-5 p.m. Thursday-Sunday. Through Dec. 29. Free. Hillforest House Museum, 213 Fifth St., Aurora, Ind. 812-926-0087.

**HOLIDAY ART EXHIBIT** — The Cincinnati Association for the Blind presents works of art by artists who are blind or visually impaired. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. Through Dec. 31. CAB facility, 2045 Gilbert Ave., Walnut Hills. 513-487-4233.

**HOLIDAY ART SHOW AT MAPLE KNOLL VILLAGE** — *Genesis & Generations*, Maple Knoll Village's Holiday Art show, features the diverse works of 19 local artists and is curated by Daniel Brown. A portion of the proceeds will benefit Maple Knoll's Benevolent Care Fund, which allows them to care for their financially-dependent residents. Through Jan. 13. Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Maple Knoll Village, 11100 Springfield Pike, Springdale. 513-782-2400.

**HOLIDAY FEST AT THE BEACH** — Here's something you and your kids can do for New Year's Eve without having to stay up until 2 a.m. Hit up The Beach Waterpark for an evening of outdoor ice-skating, carriage rides, live entertainment, food, a mini train display, a petting zoo and even an early New Year's countdown with a balloon drop. 2-10 p.m. Tuesday. \$6; pass holders and children 5 and under are free. 2590 Waterpark Drive, Mason. 800-886-7946 or [www.the-beachwaterpark.com](http://www.the-beachwaterpark.com).

**HOLIDAY JUNCTION AT THE CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER** — Revisit the great trains that once rolled in and out of Union Terminal, in miniature form, of course. This exhibit includes 2,000 square feet and a four-level train display. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday. Through Jan. 1. \$6.75; \$5.75 seniors; \$4.75 children. Union Terminal, Cincinnati Museum Center, 1301 Western Ave., West End. 513-287-7000 or [www.cincinnati-museum.org](http://www.cincinnati-museum.org).

**HOLIDAY TOY TRAINS AT BEHRINGER-CRAWFORD MUSEUM** — Bring your children to see this awesome train display setup. There will be 14 interactive stations, which will allow you to operate two of the trains and navigate them around 200 feet of track. While at the museum, children can also enjoy old-fashioned toys and activities in the parlor area. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Through Jan. 5. \$3; \$2 seniors/students; \$8 for family of four. Behringer-Crawford Museum, 1600 Montague Road, Covington. 859-491-4006.

**MIDNIGHT AT THE OASIS** — Support the Free Store/Food Bank by spending your New Year's amongst live entertainment, dining and drinks. For each couple \$3 will be donated (\$21 worth of food for the area's needy families). \$25 can feed a whole family for a week. You should also bring a couple cans of food to donate to the Free Store. 7:30 p.m. Tuesday. \$199 per couple. Oasis Conference Center, 902 Loveland-Miamiville Road, Miami Township/Clermont County. 513-583-8383.

**PNC FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS** — The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens lights up, this year with more than 2.5 million lights (the most lights at any zoo in the U.S.). It's a twinkling, walking-tour winter wonderland, thanks to PNC. Do some shopping, catch a train, join in on a carol or two and grab a snack. Never ever saw the Northern Lights? Not to worry; you can see them at the Northern Lights laser show. 5-8:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 5-9 p.m. Friday-Saturday. Through Dec. 30. \$11.50; \$9 seniors; \$6 children 2-12 years old. Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens, 3400 Vine St., Avondale. 513-281-4700 or [www.cincyzoos.org](http://www.cincyzoos.org).

**PYRAMID HILL LIGHTS UP HAMILTON** — Pyramid Hill Sculpture Park and Museum's landscape light show just keeps getting bigger and bigger. Proceeds help with the Summer Series for Kids and the Concert Series that takes place during the summer. \$12 per vehicle (of one to eight passengers) Monday-Thursday; \$14 Friday-Saturday. \$24 mini-buses (nine to 16 passengers) Monday-Thursday; \$28 Friday-Saturday. Buses (with 16 to 25 passengers) \$60 Monday-Thursday; \$72 Friday-Saturday. Hours: 6-10 p.m. Sunday-Saturday. Through Jan. 5. 1763 Hamilton-Cleves Road, Hamilton. 513-868-8336 or [www.pyramidhill.org](http://www.pyramidhill.org).

**SHAPE NOTE SINGING** — Every year beginning and experts singers come together for this New Year's Day Sing. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday. Free. Walnut Hills Christian Church, 1438 E. McMillan Ave., Walnut Hills. 513-861-1137.

**SHARON WOODS HOLIDAY IN LIGHTS** — The Alleen Company and Aggreko present this glittery light display throughout Sharon Woods. Bring the fam, a date or group of kindred spirits for a holiday drive-through. 6-10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 6-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday. Through Jan. 5. \$45 vans with 15 or more passengers; \$10 per car Friday-Saturday and holidays; \$8 per car Sunday-Thursday. Sharon Woods, route 42 off I-275 Sharonville exit, Sharonville. 513-769-0393 or [www.holidayinlights.com](http://www.holidayinlights.com).

**SWING IN THE NEW YEAR** — Brought to you from the swing scenes of Dayton and Cincinnati, the evening will be full of dancing, snacks and favors, Lee's Junction (a 10-piece big band) and plenty of singles. Don't know how to swing dance? Take a free lesson from SwingGallery. Dressy clothing would be nice. 9:30 p.m.-1 a.m. Tuesday. \$25 per person; \$20 in advance. College Hill Town Hall, 1805 Larch Ave. 513-290-9022. [www.cincyswing.com](http://www.cincyswing.com).

**WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE** — The National Park Service wants you to have a holly jolly Victorian Christmas at the birthplace of the 27th U.S. President. 2038 Auburn Ave., Mount Auburn. 513-684-3262 or [www.nps.gov/whio](http://www.nps.gov/whio).

## CLASSES

**Beat the winter chill by staying in and studying Merle Rosen's artistic expertise. ➔**

**ACTORS INTENSIVE** — Kirk Baltz and Barry Papick return to give their weekend acting workshop focusing on group and individual exercises. Pre-registration is required. Classes will be Jan. 17-19. \$275 per person. The workshop is held at Xavier University, Edgely Hall, 3800 Victory Pkwy., Avondale. To register, contact [saraelizabethtimmins@hotmail.com](mailto:saraelizabethtimmins@hotmail.com), or visit [actorsintensive@aol.com](http://actorsintensive@aol.com).

**ART ACADEMY COMMUNITY EDUCATION** — Drawing, painting, clay sculpture, photography, computer animation and glass blowing are a few of the things that will be available courtesy of the Art Academy's Winter/Spring 2003 class schedule. Classes are held at Eden Park, Mount Adams, French Park, River City Works and The Carnegie Center of Columbia-Tusculum. Prices vary. To register or for more information, call 513-562-8748.

**AFRICAN DRUMMING AND DANCING** — Bi-Oko Drum and Dance Theatre invites you to join in an open drum and dance circle. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays. ... Classes in Nigerian and Ghanaian dance, West African drumming and Yoruba and Akan languages are offered for adults and children on Tuesdays and Saturdays. ... \$10; \$7 children. Columbia Performance Center, 3900 Eastern Ave., Columbia-Tusculum. 513-321-1333 or [www.bi-okoto.com](http://www.bi-okoto.com).

**ART CLASSES** — Gallery 109 offers a variety of art classes for both adults and children. Times and dates vary. 109 Park Place, Covington. 859-261-9109 or visit [www.gallery109.com](http://www.gallery109.com).

**ARTS CONSORTIUM FALL CLASSES** — Your chance to take classes in dance, visual arts, textile art, music lessons, theatre and photography is now. Through Jan. 28. \$7 registration fee, and instructional fees vary. The Arts Consortium of Cincinnati, 1515 Linn St., West End. 513-381-0645.

**ART INSTRUCTION CLASSES IN LOVELAND** — The Loveland Art Center provides an outlet for artistic expression from an introduction to art, basic drawing, watercolors, oils, acrylics and more. For ages 5 through adult with a maximum of 10 students per class. Classes start at \$49. 649 Loveland-Madeira Road, Loveland. 513-683-1888. [www.lovelandartcenter.com](http://www.lovelandartcenter.com).

**BALLROOM AND LATIN DANCE CLASSES** — Two ballroom dance classes are offered including Latin dance. Tuesdays 6:15-7 p.m., Jan. 14-Feb. 18, 2003 or Thursdays 1:15-2 p.m., Jan. 16-Feb. 20, 2003. \$40 per person. Arthur Murray Dance Studio, 10792 Montgomery Road, Sycamore Township. Register by Jan. 10 at 513-745-5691.

**BUDDHIST CINCINNATI** — Weekly insight meditation and discussion group. Beginners welcome. 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays. 4011 Alston St., Oakley. 513-531-6032.

**CINCINNATI FOLK DANCERS** — Learn line and couple dances from Greece, Serbia, Japan, Israel and more. Beginners are welcome and no partner is needed. 8:10 p.m. Tuesdays. Madisonville Recreation Center, 5320 Stewart Road, Madisonville. 513-533-3699.

**CONTEMPORARY DANCE THEATER** — Dance classes are offered at the CDT, from Hip Hop to Afro-Caribbean to Ballet. Call for prices. Contemporary Dance Theater, 1805 Larch Ave., College Hill. 513-591-1222.

**COUNTRYSIDE YMCA DANCE LESSONS** — Offers dance lessons for Latin styles, swing dance and traditional classes in foxtrot, waltz and cha-cha. Times and days vary. \$25 member (single); \$45 member (couple); \$30 non-member (single); \$55 non-member (couple). Countryside YMCA, 1699 Deerfield Road, Lebanon. 513-932-1424.

**DANCE CLASSES** — Take ballet, tap, jazz, Dunham technique and Balinese dance classes. Wyoming Dance Center, 322 Wyoming Ave., Wyoming. 513-948-1900.

**DANCE CLASSES AT UNIVERSITY YMCA** — Offers a wide variety of dance classes. Beginners' Salsa: 7-8 p.m. Mondays; 8-9 p.m. Thursdays. \$8. For information, call Nfi Ndikintum at 859-441-3322. ... Walk-ins are welcome. No partner necessary for any class. 270 Calhoun Ave., University of Cincinnati, Clifton.

**FRENCH CLASSES** — The Alliance Française of Cincinnati is getting ready for their next session of classes for all different levels, children and adults. For more information, call 513-389-9100 or [www.france-cincinnati.com](http://www.france-cincinnati.com).

**FREE COMPUTER TRAINING/FREE EDUCATION** — All those between the ages of 8-18 are invited to free computer training/education. Enjoy snacks, fun, entertainment and field trips. 5-8 p.m. Wednesdays-Thursdays. ... Youth aerobic/workout session. 5-6 p.m. Thursdays. ... Melrose YMCA, 2840 Melrose Ave., Walnut Hills. 513-731-3227.

**GANDEN SAMDRUP-LING MONASTERY** — Community center for studies of Tibetan Buddhism and culture presents weekly meditation and dharma discourse. 7 p.m. Tuesdays. Donations requested. 3360 Bishop St., Corryville. 513-961-7110.

**HEALING MEDITATION & CHANNELING** — Come meditate with us and channel your energies. Offered Tuesday evenings by Rev. Doris Beir, Healing Touch Practitioner. Will accept donations. 3209 Madonna Drive, Edgewood. 859-341-7447.

**INTERNATIONAL FOLK DANCE** — Learn dances from Turkey, Norway, Romania, Israel, Croatia, Egypt, Germany and more. Open social dancing, teaching for beginners. No partner necessary, visitors welcome. 8-11 p.m. Saturdays. Donations welcome. The Lodge, 4120 Hamilton Ave., Northside. 513-631-8830.

**INTERNATIONAL HOLISTIC LIGHT CENTER** — Holds weekly lectures on health followed by a meditation session. Registration required. 6-8:30 p.m. Tuesdays. \$5 suggested donation. 7015 Miami Ave., Kenwood. 513-272-0202.

**KNEADING RELIEF** — This is a Partners Pregnancy Massage Class. Bring 3 pillows and a blanket. Class space is limited, so make a reservation. Second Tuesday of each month. \$25. The Art of Birthing Center of Cincinnati, Suite 2, 5945 Ridge Road, Pleasant Ridge. 513-382-6000.

**MEDITATION/SAHAJA YOGA** — Enjoy the silence within at weekly meditations. 7 p.m. Thursdays. Free. NKY Technical College, Room 102, 799 Thomas More Pkwy., Edgewood. 513-784-2720.

**NORTHERN KENTUCKY META-PHYSICAL GROUP** — Healing Meditation, Color Therapy and Channeling workshops offered 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays. Donations preferred. 3209 Madonna Drive, Edgewood. 859-341-7447.

**OLD-TIME MUSIC AND DANCE GROUP** — Young and old, experienced or beginning dancers are welcome to this weekly social dance club. All dances are taught. 7:30-10 p.m. Mondays. \$3. Church of the Annunciation Annex, 3457 Clifton Ave., Clifton. 513-681-4768.

**PAINTING CLASS** — All skill levels are welcome. Ages 16 and up. 6:30-8:30 p.m. Mondays. \$10 per class. Risch Gallery, 118 N. Fort Thomas Ave., Fort Thomas. 859-441-3838.

**SALSA CLASSES** — Join instructor Nfi Ndikintum as he guides you into Salsa perfection. Beginning and intermediate classes will be held from 7:30-9:30 p.m. on Mondays. Advanced classes will be held from 8-9 p.m. on Thursdays. \$7.50 one time cost. Participants must join Corryville Center, 2823 Eden Ave., Corryville. 513-281-0888.

**SELF-ESTEEM: A FAMILY AFFAIR** — Join Catholic Social Service's eight-week course to help increase your self-esteem and learn about parenting. Registration is due by Wednesday. Classes begin Jan. 8, 2003 from 7:15-9:45 p.m. \$65 per person. St. Peter and Paul Church, 417 Vine St., Reading. 513-241-7745.