



MUSIC MAKES THE WORLD GO 'ROUND...The Continuo Arts Symphonic Chorus is pictured in concert at the Apollo Theater, Syros, Greece in July 2019. The two-week trip featured Continuo Arts in five concerts in The International Festival of the Aegean, with Candace Wickes and Peter Tiboris conducting.

Continuo Arts Conservatory Hosts Open House

AREA— How do you get to Carnegie Hall and also travel the world? Practice, Practice, Practice, of course, but to take your first step at performing on those iconic stages, come to Continuo Arts Conservatory on Monday, September 9, and Tuesday, September 10, for open houses.

The Continuo Arts Symphonic Chorus serves as the chorus in-residence at Carnegie Hall for the largest production company, performing twice last season under the direction of Maestro John Rutter and Continuo's own Maestra Candace Wickes.

The Continuo Arts Conservatory is hosting open houses for singers of all ages on September 9 and 10. The schedule on Monday, September 9, is: Seniors Sing from 10:30-11:30 a.m. and The Youth Choir of New Jersey (High School Girls and Boys) from 7:30-9:00 p.m. On Tuesday, September 10, Children's Choir of New Jersey from 4:30-5:45 p.m., Youth Choir of New Jersey (Middle School Girls and Boys) 5:30-7:00 p.m., Civic Chorale of New Jersey (Adult Singers) 7:30-9:00 p.m.

Open houses take place at The Continuo Arts Conservatory of Music, 36 Chatham Road (rear entrance) in Summit. These free sessions for

children through adults will offer an opportunity to sing, meet other singers, learn about the choruses, and enjoy refreshments together.

In addition to local concert series, community outreach performances and professional collaborations, Continuo Arts offers unique musical and travel experiences to its members. In July they sang for the Disney *Lion King* movie premiere launch and were featured artists at The International Festival of the Aegean in five concerts during a two-week residency in Syros and Athens Greece. Previous international appearances include tours in Prague, Ireland, Italy and the historic first concert inside the Sistine Chapel by a United States organization.

The Continuo Arts Foundation is committed to making a difference in the lives of individuals, communities and cultures through music. Supporting music education and musicians, Continuo Arts offers New Jersey's most comprehensive intergenerational Choral Programs, Broadway & Beyond Musical Theater Troupe, private and group music, dance and theory lessons and produces The Minuetto Music Festival. More information can be found at www.continuoarts.com or by calling (908) 264-5324.

Premiere Stages Seeks Submissions to Play Festival

UNION—Premiere Stages, the professional theatre company in residence at Kean University, is now accepting submissions for the 16th annual Premiere Play Festival. This yearly competition for unproduced scripts offers developmental and production opportunities to four playwrights with strong ties to the greater metropolitan area (New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Delaware).

Premiere will accept submissions September 1 through December 1, 2019, and select four finalists by early March 2020; any submissions received after this submission window will not be considered. In an effort to streamline the process and make it more user-friendly, Premiere will accept all submissions electronically through Submittable at <https://premierestagesatkean.submittable.com/submit> (this link is also available through Premiere's website). All four finalists will receive developmental readings, scheduled for March 12-15, 2020, with a winner and runner-up announced in April 2020. The festival winner will be awarded a \$2,500 advance and receive a full Equity production in the 2020 Mainstage Season; the runner-up will receive \$1,000 and an Equity 29-hour staged reading June 19-21, 2020. The two remaining finalists will each receive an honorarium of \$750. In 2019, Premiere Stages received 659 submissions to the Festival.

Through the uniquely accelerated Play Festival process, Premiere Stages provides an encouraging and highly focused environment in which playwrights can develop their work. Premiere Stages also actively advocates for Festival writers by reaching out to other theatres to secure subsequent productions, and partnering with other organizations and theatres to extend the profile and life of the works developed.

In the 15 seasons since its founding, the Premiere Play Festival has received over 5,000 submissions and developed more than 80 plays. Multiple plays produced at Premiere have been honored by the American Theatre Critics Association, and/or been published by Samuel French, Dramatists Play Service, Dramatic Publishing Company, Playscripts and Broadway Play Publishing. A number of Play Festival winners and finalists have subsequently been produced in

New York and at regional theatres across the country. To assist with the expansion of the Festival, three new literary staff are joining Premiere, including Claudia Nolan, Literary Associate, and Megan Tobias, Literary and Producing Assistant. The third position, a new full-time Education and Play Festival Manager, will be hired in September.

"With the sharp increase in submissions and expanded interest in the Festival, the program is growing and evolving," stated John J. Wooten, Producing Artistic Director and founder of Premiere Stages. "We are very excited to welcome Claudia and Megan to the team and look forward to the new manager joining us in September."

All 2020 Premiere Play Festival entries will be evaluated by a panel of theatre professionals in consultation with Premiere artistic staff. Agents and theatre professionals with an affiliation to Premiere Stages may submit full scripts; playwrights may submit a synopsis and script sample directly. There is no fee to enter the competition. Complete submission guidelines are available at <http://www.premierestagesatkean.com/play-festival>. Premiere Stages is committed to supporting a diverse group of writers; playwrights of all backgrounds, ages, and experience levels are encouraged to submit. All entrants are encouraged to review Premiere Stages' production history, which is also posted on the website.

Premiere Stages is committed to producing topical plays and interactive programs that reflect people of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, religious groups, gender identities, ages, abilities, disabilities and sexual preferences.



POPCORN

The Peanut Butter Falcon Wrestling with Bigotry 2 & 1/2 popcorns

One Popcorn, Poor — Two Popcorns, Fair — Three Popcorns, Good — Four Popcorns, Excellent

By Michael S. Goldberg
film critic

It is bighearted, pleasantly pie-in-the-sky save for some routine tumult in the climax, and provides a good service in dramatizing the realities of living with the genetic disorder known as Down syndrome. But my problem as I viewed "The Peanut Butter Falcon" is that I was more fascinated by the lead actor, Zack Gottsagen, than by the story. You see, Mr. Gottsagen does indeed have Down syndrome. And his starring role in this Twain-like adventure yarn about a man institutionalized because of his Down syndrome who takes it on the lam to claim his destiny as a professional wrestler, is no small watershed, either for cinema or for others possessing that third copy of chromosome 21.

Thus, in this accomplishment, Mr. Gottsagen flourishes his acting chops and more than tacitly assumes an unofficial ambassadorship. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then this feature-length film speaks educational volumes about the disorder that is ostensibly its cause-célèbre. Which is why it is recommended here for anyone who might benefit from a bit of enlightenment and humanitarian understanding. But that said, if an actor with the usual amount of chromosomes were to play Zak, the experience might be just as elucidating, but hardly as intriguing.

As an analogous example, while Dustin Hoffman wasn't an autistic savant like his title character in *Rain Man* (1988) is controversially speculated to be, the script and production standards of director Barry Levinson's multi-award-winning film are superb. And as such, it is both studiously informative and highly entertaining, albeit not groundbreaking. The unique genuineness of *The Peanut Butter Falcon* is apparent in every frame. It is the proof of the pudding as Zak exacts Zak...proving he can act.

And so, here's the big however. Writer-directors Tyler Nilson and Michael Schwartz's script isn't especially novel, places a real-world problem in a semi-fantasy environment, and alas, lacks the plot curveballs to keep it from being crowd-pleasingly predictable. Therefore, if put under the microscope in a three-credit film appreciation course at dear Olde Ivy Film Criticism College, the conundrum to be mullied, written in big letters on the blackboard by Professor Halberstadter, would be, "Is this creative entertainment or progressive civilization improvement?"

It is at very least the last. I mean, c'mon. Have you read the news? We need all the altruism we can get. It wasn't that long ago when folks with Down syndrome and a bunch of other disorders were randomly tossed into bedlam-like facilities. The entertainment value, therefore, which begs a definition of the term itself, depends in great part on how much of its goodwill translates to amusement for the individual viewer.

That said, there is an undeniable magnetism achieved by the protagonist. Far-fetched or doable, who would pooh-pooh the dream of a fellow traveler the way the administrator at the old-age home that constrains Zak does? Even Dakota Johnson's Eleanor, the angelic social worker directly in charge of Zak, while humoring his Quixotic determination, doesn't believe for a second that he

could achieve his goal, let alone survive without supervision. Facts is, other than his curmudgeonly but supportive senior-citizen roomie, Karl, splendidly etched in little more than a cameo by Bruce Dern, no one takes his visions of grappling glory seriously. And quite frankly, we wonder ourselves.

Yet if you choose to buy in, you'll agree that for every great passion, fictional or real, there is an afflatus just waiting to spur you on. All you have to do is to be open enough in heart and soul to accept them.

Hence it only follows that in what becomes a road and river film after Zak breaks loose, our would-be ring hero crosses paths with and forms an accommodation with the at-first-be-grudging Tyler, a smalltime outlaw smartly conjured by Shia LaBeouf. Ah, nothing like roughing it in the wild outdoors with a potential kindred spirit: scrounging for food, swapping stories, rationalizing your lifestyle and fantasizing of great expectations. And if a pretty gal like Eleanor, who's been desperately hunting for her lost charge, adds a bit of romantic interest to the bucolic scenery, what's not to like?

Adding to the potpourri of quirky circumstances whenever literature ventures a meditation on damaged and/or lost souls who merge their destinies, there is the idea of the imagined Shangri-la. In both *The Big Street* (1942), featuring Lucille Ball in her greatest dramatic performance, and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), the panacea is the healthful climes of Florida. Here, Zak's idea of nirvana is a bit north of there, in the small southern town where Thomas Haden Church's Saltwater Redneck runs his rassling academy.

Now, I won't say if Zak ever gets to meet his idol. Simply suffice it to note that the lessons to be learned from searching for life's silver lining are all perfunctorily in place. While brimming with feel-good, no-holds-barred sentiment, *The Peanut Butter Falcon* is more edifying than artistic.

The Peanut Butter Falcon, rated PG-13, is a Roadside Attractions release directed by Tyler Nilson and Michael Schwartz and stars Zack Gottsagen, Shia LeBeouf and Dakota Johnson. Running time: 93 minutes.

Artists Invited to Register for 'Paint Out'

CRANFORD — Artists of all ages and abilities are invited to register for the Paint Out plein-air painting event in Cranford to take place Saturday, September 21. The first 50 Community Artists to register online will get a special Paint Out tote bag filled with complimentary goodies.

There are two categories to register for: Young Artist (16 & under) and Community Artist (17 & over). Young Artists will each receive a prize. There will be a judging for first, second and third place for the Community Artists.

The finished pieces will be on display and available for purchase at Hanson Park, located on Springfield Avenue, from 4 to 5 p.m. the same day.

Artists of all ages and abilities are invited to join. Find out how to register online at www.theartistframer.com. Online registration ends soon.

Scotch Plains Public Library's Sunday Sounds Continues with Danielle Illario

SCOTCH PLAINS — On Sunday, September 8, at 2 p.m., local musician Danielle Illario will launch the Scotch Plains Library fall season of Sunday Sounds with a selection of American Standard jazz, R&B, and hip-hop. Ms. Illario can be found performing across New York and New Jersey, including the Blue Note, Montclair Social Club, and the Capitol Theater. She has written and recorded for multiple artists and cites Nina Simone, Steely Dan, and Stevie Wonder as her top influences.

No registration is required for this

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ARTS EDUCATION...NJ PAC is having an open house where area kids ages 10-18 can try out a class. Pictured above is a jazz class teens can give a try.

Open House Arts Training At NJPAC Is Set for Sept. 7

NEWARK — On Saturday, September 7, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the NJPAC Center for Arts Education, located at 24 Rector Street, prospective students will have the opportunity to meet faculty and take trial classes.

Students ages 10 through 18 can spend the day with the NJPAC Center for Arts Education and discover the exciting opportunities offered. Prospective students will have the opportunity to meet lead members of the faculty, participate in trial classes, and register for classes on-site.

The Open House trial classes include: Jazz for Teens Workshop, Hip Hop Beatmaking Workshop, Hip Hop Dance Workshop, Acting Workshop.

New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), located in downtown New-

ark has the most diverse programming and audience of any performing arts center in the country, and is the artistic, cultural, educational and civic center of New Jersey—where great performances and events enhance and transform lives every day. NJPAC brings diverse communities together, providing access to all and showcasing the state's and the world's best artists while acting as a leading catalyst in the revitalization of its home city. Through its extensive Arts Education programs, NJPAC is shaping the next generation of artists and arts enthusiasts. NJPAC has attracted more than 8 million visitors (including over 1.6 million children) since opening its doors in 1997, and nurtures meaningful and lasting relationships with each of its constituents.

Rock Opera Chess Will Open CDC Theatre's 101st Season

CRANFORD — The 2019-20 season at CDC Theatre in Cranford will open with the complex rock opera *Chess*, with lyrics by Tim Rice and music by Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvæus of ABBA fame. In the musical the ancient game becomes a metaphor for romantic rivalries, competitive gamesmanship, super-power politics and international intrigues.

The pawns in the drama form a love triangle: the loutish American chess star, the earnest Russian champion and the Hungarian American female assistant who arrives at the match with the American but falls for the Russian. From Bangkok to Budapest, the players, lovers, politicians and spies manipulate and are manipulated to the pulse of a monumental rock score that includes the international pop hits "One Night in Bangkok" and "I Know Him So Well".

"In addition to *Chess* being one of the most beautiful musical scores ever written, what excites me about the show is that it is at once a historical representation of the Cold War and a very timely exploration of US/Russia political relations given present day tensions," said Director Edgar Hidalgo. "CDC Theatre is producing the original London stage version of *Chess*, with the addition of "Someone Else's Story" from the Broadway production. We are ex-

cited to be presenting *Chess* in association with the New Jersey City University (NJCU). Students and alumni of NJCU are represented on-stage and in the orchestra, and the university's musical theatre and music departments are providing support in other areas of the production."

The production will run from Friday, September 27, through Saturday, October 12. Information on how to get tickets can be found by visiting cdctheatre.org, with the best selections and prices available online.

Men's Ensemble Sings Sept. 8 at Holy Trinity

WESTFIELD — Quorus, an all-male vocal ensemble based out of the Baltimore/D.C. metropolitan area, will give a free performance at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, September 8, at Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church at 315 First Street. Quorus is a men's chamber ensemble founded in 2014. They strive to present choral music written for men's voices at a high level of proficiency and musicianship. Quorus is currently the ensemble-in-residence at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church in Cockeysville, Md., in partnership with Dr. Lynn Trapp, director of Liturgy and Music. A reception will follow the 7:30 p.m. performance. Admission is free.

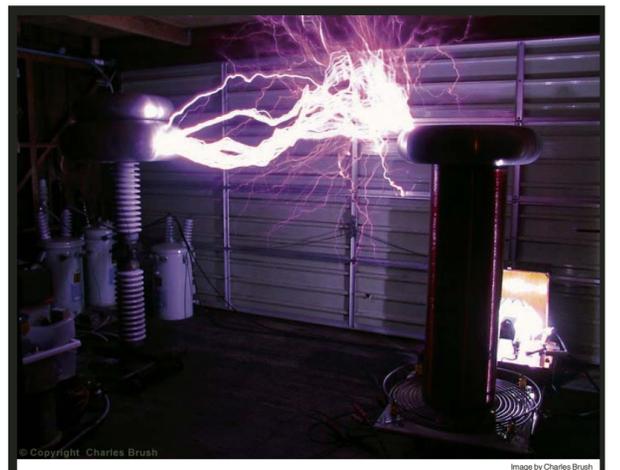
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