

Performing Arts InterSECT at NFA showcases region's talent

Sunday

Posted Mar 19, 2017 at 6:50 PM

Updated Mar 19, 2017 at 7:53 PM

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NORWICH — The stage at Slater Auditorium was host to a rich mix of performances Sunday — from stand-up comedy and a wacky Addams Family musical number to a Puccini opera piece and ballet dancers, all part of a celebration of the arts presented by the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition.

The nine performances that were part of Performing Arts InterSECT at Norwich Free Academy were designed to showcase just how much talent Eastern Connecticut has, from actors and chorus singers to woodwind musicians and a storytelling musical duo.

"We're really trying to get the word out about all the great opportunities you have in this region for performing arts," Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition Executive Director Wendy Bury said.

Performing Arts InterSECT brought together 18 arts organizations in 2016 as part of the Rising Tide Series collaborative project. It resulted in a glossy 16-page color brochure promoting performing arts in Eastern Connecticut, complete with a map showing each organization's location and informational capsules about each.

"There are 20,000 brochures that were produced and all will head home with these organizations to distribute at their events this spring and summer," Bury said.

The coalition serves 500 partners in the region, Bury said. "There are far more than 18, but these 18 that are featured together provide hundreds of programs every year and serve about 110,000 people every year," she said.

Among the featured groups is the Chestnut Street Playhouse, based in Norwich. Some of its performers were in costume as the Addams Family on Sunday and took the stage to belt out "When You're an Addams," the opening scene from "Addams Family," which opens Thursday at the playhouse and runs through April 9.

Other Norwich-based organizations that took part were the Chelsea Players, with member Erika Webb doing a monologue as a southern snake handler from "Talking With," and Artreach, with Sam Bliven's comedic one-man take on mental health issues.

"You know you've been in the psych ward too long when you go to Wal-Mart and, as you leave, you try to sign out," Bliven said.

Also represented Sunday on stage were several groups based in New London, Mystic and elsewhere ^{false} in Eastern Connecticut. They included the Mystic River Chamber Singers, Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra, Connecticut Lyric Opera, the Emerson Theater Collaborative and the Eastern Connecticut Ballet.

Bury and others also used Sunday's event to promote the vitality of the arts at a time when funding for such programs in the federal budget is increasingly threatened.

"As a human rights lawyer, I've always thought that access to the arts is a basic human right," Maryam Elahi, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, said. "When I think of a world without music, without paintings, without theater, I think of a prison, and we don't want that."