

# **Spotlight on the arts: Performance, brochure highlight area groups**



Eastern Connecticut Ballet is among the multiple groups performing March 19 in Norwich. ECB dancers pictured here are,

from left, Tierin-Rose Mandelburg, Ellie Wiese and Anna Pellegrino.

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Eighteen performing arts organizations in the region have joined forces to create a brochure highlighting all of their groups — and they are introducing the brochure with a hour-long free public show on March 19 in Norwich.

This directory of performing-arts organizations can be used by audience members who want to learn about shows and programs they might not have known about, of course, but it's also for folks who might want to join one of the organizations and for groups who would like to collaborate.

The brochure contains a photo, location, and website for each group, along with a description of their focus. For instance, The Chelsea Players in Norwich is described this way: "Since 1983, The Chelsea Players has presented over 70 plays and concerts in Norwich. We prefer plays (that are) accessible yet non-mainstream, including work by local playwrights. We welcome members interested in community theater and the arts."

The arts organizations participating in the brochure and March 19 show are part of a regional collective marketing initiative dubbed Performing Arts InterSECT. This project to create cooperative marketing materials comes out of a partnership between the organizations and the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition. The coalition advocates for and supports arts, heritage, cultural and business activities and organizations in the area.

By spring, 20,000 copies of the brochure — dubbed the Performing Arts InterSECT Resource Guide — will be distributed to the participating sites, as well as to some local libraries. The sites will then hand them out to their audiences at performances over the summer.

Coalition Executive Director Wendy Bury says the idea behind it is: "If you love the arts and you love performing arts, do you know about other ones that are here?"

The performing-arts-focused brochure follows an historic-house brochure launched last spring. Most of the historic houses — which likewise came together under the coalition's guidance — saw an uptick in attendance after the brochure program began, with some seeing as much as a 15-20 percent increase, according to Bury. (She notes that there might be other factors playing into that, too.)

When contemplating how to launch the performing-arts brochure, the answer was, as Bury says, "Let's put on a show!"

These groups, after all, are experts in doing just that. Nine of the 18 organizations are performing, with Flock Theatre doing puppetry beforehand. The groups onstage will include Connecticut Lyric Opera, the Connecticut Storytelling Center and the Mystic River Chorale.

Rob Richter, director of arts programming at Connecticut College, is part of a producing committee for the event, and he's determining the staging and flow of the show.

"It's an eclectic group of performances," he says. "(It serves) to give a sampler, to give a suggestion of what's here ... to give people an awareness of the wealth of performing arts that's really right in our backyard."

The theory, he adds, is that the event "will draw people who are familiar with a particular group who will then discover another group."

The performances will range from the Chestnut Street Playhouse doing the opening scene of "The Addams Family" musical, to the Radiance Woodwind Quintet performing woodwind compositions, to a stand-up comic from Artreach, to Eastern Connecticut Ballet performing the "Halloween Waltz" with music by Saint-Saens. Each group is limited to five to seven minutes.

The public can arrive early or stay afterward to learn more about the various organizations. In the lobby, representatives from the Garde Arts Center, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, and the Norwich Arts Center, among others, will offer a variety of information for the public — materials, event schedules, student opportunities and summer program details.

“If you have a kid in a drama club who really likes performing arts, (he or she) now has the opportunity to go around from table to table, to think about this as a career, even how to pursue it and find out about volunteers, summer camp ... You've got one-stop shopping in that event,” Bury says.

A related aspect that will be showcased is that there are many behind-the-scenes jobs in the performing arts that kids might not know about, from directors to producers to choreographers to tech support.

Another note: The group is trying to make the show and brochure accessible to everyone, thanks to the encouragement of Sandra Streeter. Streeter is blind and is a member of the Mystic River Chorale, which is part of the initiative.

Those accessibility efforts include offering large print and Braille versions of the brochure that are downloadable and of the event program; a volunteer sign language interpreter at the event; and earplugs available for attendees with sensory issues. Requests for the Braille and descriptive guides at the March 19 event are due by March 7.

Bury says that Streeter “has helped our group learn about how we can provide accessibility services at performances and also within our own organizations. From easy-to-integrate tips on how to make our websites more friendly, such as including descriptions of the photos, to thinking about how we can provide a range of accessibility services at events, Sandra has served as a compass for inclusivity and a constant reminder for us to strive to do so.”

The fact that the various performing-arts organizations have joined together to create marketing materials benefits all of those groups. Particularly with decreased state funding to support nonprofit arts organizations, Bury notes, organizations realize there are economies of scale to working together to increase exposure, attract larger audiences, and enhance visitor experiences. In addition, she says, “together, we (can) build a brand for our region, and leverage our assets to benefit the individual organizations, the audiences, and the performing arts industry in southeastern Connecticut.”



From left, Teresa Whitaker and Frank Schwartz from the Connecticut Storytelling Center will perform at the Performing Arts InterSECT show.

(More than 100,000 people total attend events at these organizations each year, Bury says.)

For groups to be highlighted in the brochure, they had to attend a certain number of monthly meetings; kick in the \$200 each to pay for the brochures (the coalition likewise pays a \$200 portion); and take on a task. The latter might have meant, say, gathering photographs or finding sponsors or developing content.

“Everyone was required to take on a different role and responsibility,” Bury says.

Some organizations weren’t able to do this but are listed on a single page as an additional resource guide.

## **If you go**

What: Performing Arts InterSECT performance and brochure launch

When: Show begins at 3 p.m. March 19; event runs 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Where: Slater Auditorium, Norwich Free Academy, 305 Broadway, Norwich

Length of show: About an hour

Admission: Free

For more information: [CultureSECT.org](http://CultureSECT.org)