

From the comfort of your own campus

How to keep entertained without leaving the Northwestern

July 6th, 2004

by Robert VerBruggen

There are plenty of distractions in and around Chicago. With a trip on the El or a walk around Evanston, Northwestern students can go to numerous concerts, shows and movies every weekend.

But all that travel may not be necessary. Courtesy of the University and countless student groups, NUers can find entertainment without setting foot off campus.

Some options are:

Arts Alliance

"Arts Alliance is the biggest student-produced theater organization in the country, and we put on about three main stage shows," said Dave Murphy, Co-Chair Business of Arts Alliance and a former Chronicle Entertainment editor. "We also host some of the top satellite groups."

Satellite groups include Meow, a short-form comedy improvisation group.

Arts Alliance's first show will be "Garden Party." "It's a week or two after New Student Week," said Murphy. "It's the first show people see in Shanley Pavilion."

The year's line-up will include "Assassins," currently a large Broadway hit.

To join Arts Alliance, Murphy said, "Look anywhere on campus – there are always flyers for auditions." In the 2004-2005 school year, Arts Alliance will be seeking more seasonal designers for its satellite groups, he added.

A&O

A&O, more than any other group, brings professional entertainment to Northwestern. Last year's shows included Gavin DeGraw and The Roots.

"The A&O model is total programming," said chairman Brian Bockrath. "So basically, we try to offer a variety of films, speakers, comedians and concerts."

Despite the hefty budget and big names, students have plenty of control, Bockrath said. "Our staff is made up of exclusively students – there are some advisors, but the actual membership is 100 percent undergrads."

The best way to get involved, Bockrath said, will be to attend Fall quarter's Activities Fair in the Norris University Center.

The Titanic Players

"The Titanic Players do what we call long-form improv. It's dif than Meow, which is short-form," said Mike Abdelsayed, creative artistic director and founder of the group.

"Meow is like 'Whose Line is it Anyway,' whereas we're like 'Seinfeld' but improvised," he said. "We start four different characters or storylines that intertwine during a 30 minute piece."

Liz Cackowski, an alumnus of both Meow and The Titanic Players, was recently hired as a writer for Saturday Night Live, Abdelsayed said.

The Titanic Players are divided into four teams, based on years of membership. First-year members join the Incubator team; second-, third- and fourth-year members join the House, Main and Residents teams respectively.

"The Main and Residents teams don't have to rehearse if they don't want to," said Abdelsayed. "The House team practices once a week, and the Incubator team practices twice at least."

During Winter and Spring quarters, The Titanic Players perform every Monday night. Other events for the coming year (the group's 10th) will include the first-of-its-kind Chicago Improv Festival, a national celebration at which The Titanic Players will be the lead group.

To join The Titanic Players, e-mail thetitanicplayers@ameritech.net. Auditions will take place in October, Abdelsayed said.

Boomshaka

Boomshaka is a dance and rhythm ensemble – think "Stomp" by Northwestern students. Members clap, stomp, chant and hit household items in complicated patterns.

Contact information is available at www.boomshaka.org.

Niteskool

Niteskool is an organization that promotes campus bands. Each year, the group puts out a music video and a compilation CD. Both are completely student-produced.

The 2003-2004 music video was for Samsara's "Pop Cynic." It was showcased at the Chicago Community Cinema and honored at the College Emmy Awards in Los Angeles, the Northwestern Chronicle reported in April.

Contact information is available at www.rtvf.nwu.edu/organizations/niteskool.

A cappella

For whatever reason, a cappella groups are all the rage at Northwestern. Most, including the all-male Freshman Fifteen, the all-female Significant Others and the co-ed Purple Haze, sing pop/R&B covers, complete with mouth-simulated percussion. More out-of-the-ordinary fare includes the Middle Eastern-themed Brown Sugar.

If the past is any indication, the a cappella groups will perform together early in the year. It will prove an interesting spectacle for those new to the genre, and audition times will be announced at the event. Those interested in joining should also check the ground for flyers.

Exhibits

For those interested in more refined entertainment, there is a variety of art on display on the North-western campus. Students can check out the Norris University Center's Dittmar Gallery, the North-western University Library or the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art (the Block Museum also shows films).

...and everything else

These examples merely scratch the surface of Northwestern entertainment. For example, there is the theater group Waa-Mu, and the School of Music often brings prominent concerts in the more "respectable" genres of music.

Speakers are another option. For politics, groups have brought Ann Coulter, Dinesh D'Souza, Juan Williams and Michael Moore in the last year alone. The academic schools frequently bring experts in their fields to present.

For more information about on-campus entertainment, go to hereandnow.northwestern.edu.

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