AMIDST CHARLESTON’S OASIS OF SANDY BEACHES, RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, STORIED ANTEBELLUM HOMES AND COBBLED STREETS, A NEW CULTURAL ATTRACTION IS EMERGING.

A BURGEONING THEATER SCENE IS INVIGORATING THE CITY’S ARTS SENSIBILITIES AS NEW THEATERS SPRING UP EVERY YEAR AND MORE VENERATED VENUES CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN IN POPULARITY AND SIZE.

By Melissa Harrison

Thanks to the collaboration of five of the city’s leading local theaters and a generous grant from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation (GDDF), the newly established Theatre Charleston is now helping to establish Charleston’s reputation as a vibrant theater destination. Theatre Charleston is modeled after the League of Chicago Theatres, an alliance of theaters that promote the theater industry and Chicago’s metropolitan area as a whole. In the summer of 2005, the founders of the GDDF, which splits its time between Chicago and the Lowcountry, inspired representatives from Charleston’s local theaters to explore this dynamic service organization.

Out of this visit came the realization that a more organized, long-term collaboration could produce an appreciation for the theater arts much larger than the sum of its parts. Its mission, similar to that of its mentor, is to “promote awareness and visibility for live theater in the Charleston area and provide services that strengthen the operations of both the member theaters and performing arts organizations in general.”

Since its inception, Theatre Charleston has signed on nine members, an impressive alliance of more than half the city’s theaters. Members include Actors’ Theatre of South Carolina, Art Forms and Theatre Concepts, Charleston Stage, College of Charleston Department of Theatre, The Company Company, the Footlight Players, PURE Theatre, Sheri Grace Productions and The Village Playhouse.

Combined, these theaters offer a wealth of live performances throughout the season and unlimited experience and expertise—not to mention a highly dedicated fan base. On the most traditional end of the spectrum is Charleston Stage, resident troupe at the esteemed Dock Street Theater. Known for producing Broadway-style musicals and Pulitzer Prize-winning dramas, it is Charleston’s largest theater company. At the other end of the spectrum is PURE Theatre, an evolving stage and film company that showcases the visceral, dramatic works from today’s rising and celebrated playwrights.

And then there is everything in between. Lovers of classic American theater venture to Mount Pleasant’s Village Playhouse, while The Footlight Players, Charleston’s oldest continuously performing theater company, offers a theatrical tradition for anyone with an appreciation for local talent. Founded in 1931, The Footlight Players recently celebrated its 75th anniversary. Art Forms and Theatre Concepts, Charleston’s premiere African-American theater company, brings an added dimension to the alliance, with performances detailing the African-American experience. The ensemble has produced quality theater in the Lowcountry for over a decade.

Also helping to bolster the organization is the award-winning College of Charleston Department of Theatre. In addition to teaching the art of theater and acting, it presents thought-provoking works throughout the season. And, based just outside of Charleston on beautiful Folly Beach is Actors’ Theatre of South Carolina offering performances and classes in all levels of acting as well as specialized classes in filmmaking and writing.

For the general public, the benefits of the alliance are multi-fold. Theatre Charleston is a dynamic resource for anyone interested in learning more about theater in the area. The website contains a comprehensive calendar of theater events spanning the full year and even more detailed information about each show.

To find out more...

Theatre Charleston
843-973-8578
www.theatrecharleston.com