used song to share their story of the joy of freedom from apartheid. With resident companies that include the South Carolina Children’s Theater, the South Carolina Ballet and the Greenville Choral Society, hardly a night goes by that there isn’t something going on at the Peace Center. Aiken may be best known for horses, but the Washington Center for Performing Arts (803-648-1438; www.walhallacityauditorium.com) is adding to the riches of the region with top-notch local theater, song and dance reviews and international performers such as the Celtic Tenors and Quartetto Gelato, an internationally renowned classical group that entertains through both instrumental music and operatic voice. A long theater season (it runs from September through April) means that visitors have a better-than-average chance to see a show. Creative scheduling such as an educational program with New York’s Juilliard School of Music that brought jazz students to Aiken for a week of concerts and impromptu jam sessions, means that cutting-edge performances are always a possibility.

In tiny Walhalla, residents missed the joy of local theater, so they got to work and, in 2003, transformed a schoolhouse into the Walhalla Civic Auditorium (864-723-5166; www.walhallacityauditorium.com). Although local productions dominate the schedule, word is getting out: the Glenn Miller Orchestra recently played at the center.

To ensure that beach lovers can get a dash of culture with their sun and sand, the resident Hallelujah Singers at the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina (888-860-2787; www.artscenterhhi.org) on Hilton Head Island runs long into the summer. Although the Arts Center has a full schedule of dramas, musicals and comedies featuring talented local performers, special events, such as summer concerts with the resident Hallelujah Singers, who present a musical history of the Gullah people, are truly one of a kind. Just a shell’s throw from Polly Beach, Isle of Palms and Kiawah and Seabrook Islands, the historic Dock Street Theatre (843-577-7187; www.charlestonstage.com) brings music, dance and theater to Charleston.

Universities are often a catalyst for the growth of cultural events in smaller cities, and in South Carolina that proves true. In Greenwood, Lander University’s Cultural Center (864-388-8326; www.lander.edu) draws national and international musical, dance and theatrical performances such as the Harlem Boys Choir, the Tokyo String Quartet and Grammy Award-winning soprano Dawn Upshaw. At Clemson University, the Brooks Center for the Performing Arts (864-656-7787; www.clemson.edu/brooks) has staged more than 800 productions since it opened in 1993, including the Moscow Festival Ballet. Free student shows and recitals are regularly scheduled, as are experimental performances in the state-of-the-art black box theater.

Whether you choose to see your favorite performer or to take a chance on someone new, one thing is certain: in South Carolina, there’s no bad seat in the house.

Left to right, performances at: The Peace Center, Greenville; The Arts Center of Coastal Carolina, Hilton Head Island; The Koger Center, Columbia; The Washington Center, Aiken.