

Number of Minnesotans without health insurance grows by 18,000

Two dozen Hennepin County employees investigated for suspected misconduct,

Met Council scrambles to disperse sewer stench in south Minneapolis

First National Bank in St. Paul to be converted into apartments

VARIETY

37 things we're looking forward to in the Twin Cities arts scene in 2017

Our writers are happy to turn the page on 2016 and are setting their sights on these concerts, performances, shows and books this year.

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LEILA NAVIDI - STAR TRIBUNE

The refurbished Palace Theatre.

If you weren't already sick and tired of 2016, the deaths last week of George Michael and Carrie Fisher — and then Carrie's mom, Debbie Reynolds! — confirmed it: Yeah, it's been a tough year on the arts and entertainment beat.

That's why our writers are happy to turn the page, and set their sights on the year ahead. We're primed for the opening this winter of the Palace Theatre, which promises to be a world-class concert venue. In spring, the adventurous Mixed Blood Theatre suits up at CHS Field for some baseball-infused drama. And next summer the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden will rock again after a yearlong renovation; when Bon Iver warbles "It might be over soon" to the crowd there July 22, you may know exactly how he feels.

Palace Theatre could rule the concert scene

It's fitting that the **Palace Theatre** is only a couple of blocks from Roy Wilkins Auditorium, since the former will probably blow the latter out of the water as a concert venue when it opens in March after a \$15.6 million overhaul. It could ignite nightlife in downtown St. Paul, too.

Built in 1916, the Palace has been shuttered and deteriorating on the 7th Place walking mall since 1977. It promises much better acoustics (and aesthetics) than the notoriously ill-designed Wilkins. And with its 2,800-person capacity, the theater falls in the same in-between range as the Wilkins — smaller than an arena but bigger than clubs like the legendary First Avenue, whose staff will book and manage the place.

Two traits set the Palace apart from the historic theaters in Minneapolis that host occasional rock shows: a more artist-friendly booking policy, and a fan-friendly ground floor space without permanent seating. As many as 2,000 spectators will be able to stand, roam, dance or mosh while 800 more can grab seats in the balcony. It's a setup that mimics popular rock venues elsewhere, including the Wiltern in Los Angeles. Sounds foolproof, really.

Regina Spektor already has a March 26 date there, and more March and April concerts will be announced soon. -- Chris Riemenschneider

Cowles Center dominates dance calendar in the new year

The new year brings promising shows at nontraditional venues including Art Shanty Projects and go-to space Fresh Oyster, but I'm more intrigued by the lineups at established stages, especially the Cowles Center. In "**Still Life for the Cowles Center**" March 17-19, Minnesota dancer Morgan Thorson re-imagines the Cowles as a ruin, as an abandoned proscenium theater.

Collaborations are one indicator of a healthy dance scene, and one of 2017's most delicious-sounding combinations is Joe Chvala's **Flying Foot Forum** and **Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theater**, performing together at the Cowles April 21-23. Birthdays are another sign of life. **Shapiro & Smith** celebrates its 30th at the Cowles April 13-15, performing works old and new.

As the Twin Cities hip-hop dance movement picks up steam, be sure to catch the May 19-21 run of "**Mixtape**," featuring a lineup of breakthrough artists at the Cowles. And don't miss "**Oyate Okodakicyapi**," a festival of indigenous choreographers curated by Rosy Simas March 4 at the Ordway. -- Sheila Regan

Batter up! Mixed Blood takes over CHS Field

Three shows top my list for 2017. Batting leadoff is "**Safe at Home**," a Mixed Blood Theatre production at CHS Field — home of the St. Paul Saints — that uses baseball as a prism to examine topics such as immigration, politics and celebrity. Theater founder Jack Reuler directs this epic premiere March 7-12, with a cast of 18 performing throughout the stadium (dugout, locker rooms, batting cages).

New York-based playwright and performer Zakiyyah Alexander teams with Imani Uzuri for "**Girl Shakes Loose**," a new musical at Penumbra Theatre about a woman's search for herself. Directed by the fiery poetry of Sonia Sanchez, the April 20-May 14 show is directed by May Adrales, who helmed Qui Nguyen's critically acclaimed "Vietgone." (That play, incidentally, will get its regional premiere at Mixed Blood April 10-30, it was announced last week.)

Finally, while Jake Gyllenhaal and Annaleigh Ashford are grabbing the Broadway spotlight with their limited-run concert version of "**Sunday in the Park With George**," you can look forward to the whole kit-and-caboodle at the Guthrie June 17-Aug. 20. It's directed by Joe Haj, whose "South Pacific" sold out its run last summer. The Guthrie's first mainstage production of a Stephen Sondheim musical is likely to create a similar buzz. -- Rohan Preston

A snowballing interest in Nordic music

I like the looks of "**Where Words End**," a May festival that promises Nordic folk songs, Norwegian fiddling and heady new works. Hosted by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, it is certainly ambitious — with 11 concerts spanning three weeks, four programs and five venues. Focused on Nordic music and culture, the festival takes its name from Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, who once said, "For me, music begins where words end." Violinist and fellow Finn Pekka Kuusisto will lead a deep dive into Sibelius' works to start the fest.

Most intriguing is Liquid Music's performance on May 9, which spotlights **Bedroom Community**, an Icelandic crew and record label, and Swedish songstress **Mariam Wallentin**, whom curator Kate Nordstrum describes as "spellbinding and majestic and dark." That concert will take over the grounds of the American Swedish Institute — the perfect stage, perhaps, for this mix of the classical and current, traditional and daring. -- Jenna Ross

Starting with 'Hidden Figures,' here are movies to unite us

No matter how divided we may feel in daily life, movies can be a reminder of important values that unite us: the delight of togetherness and shared feelings. That's a state of mind I wish for everyone.

I can offer early applause to the January releases of "**Hidden Figures**," an uplifting drama about three black women who played key roles in the early days of the U.S. space program; "**A Monster Calls**," a touching children's fantasy about life after loss, and "**Patriots Day**," a breathtaking manhunt thriller about how Bostonians responded after two brothers set off bombs amid crowds watching the city's annual marathon.

Other coming films are unseen but intriguing. March will bring the locally filmed comedy-drama "**Wilson**," starring Woody Harrelson as a mouthy curmudgeon (he's good at that). May promises the slap-happy Marvel blockbuster sequel "**Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2**." July brings Christopher Nolan's World War II epic "Dunkirk," which has produced stunning trailers.

October delivers the long-awaited replicant thriller "**Blade Runner 2049**" directed by Denis Villeneuve (of "Sicario" and "Arrival"), with a cast including Ryan Gosling, Harrison Ford and Twin Cities native Barkhad Abdi.

Live comedy can get you away from the box

TV is coming off its richest year ever with another tantalizing one ahead. Look for **Tina Fey**'s take on cable news (coming in April to NBC), a return to "**Twin Peaks**" (early summer, Showtime) and Ken Burns' thorough examination of "The Vietnam War" (fall, PBS). I'm tempted to invest in a new easy chair and sweatpants.

But 2016 was also the year I fell back in love with live stand-up. Acme Comedy Co. will continue to be the gold standard, but it'll be hard to resist the Orpheum Theatre's marquee names like **Jerry Seinfeld** (Jan. 19-20), **Chris Rock** (March 10-12) and **Steve Martin/Martin Short** (May 18-19). Also keep an eye on the Woman's Club of Minneapolis and Skyway Theatre, venues that dare to book differently, as well as underdogs like New Hope Cinema Grill, operating under the wacky theory that suburban folks need laughs, too.

At any moment, homegrown talent **Andy Erickson** could break into the majors, **All Wong**, that comedy circuit's most thrilling new voice, could sneak back into town, or that crazy dude at the Dulono's Pizza open-mic night could trigger a fistfight.

Your TV will wait for you. -- Neal Justin

Merce Cunningham will light up the Walker

I made my first-ever trip to Minnesota in 2008. The occasion was "Merce on the Rocks," the Walker Art Center's monumental staging of Merce Cunningham's "Ocean" in a quarry near St. Cloud. Since then, Cunningham has died, his sets have been added to the Walker collection and I've relocated from Washington, D.C., to the Twin Cities.

What I'm looking forward to most in 2017 is the Walker's next major homage to Merce: "**Merce Cunningham: Common Time**," five months of programming (starting Feb. 8) that includes music by his late partner John Cage, art by Robert Rauschenberg and, of course, lots of dancing. Standout members of Cunningham's now-closed company will perform chamber works at the museum, while at the University of Minnesota, French company CCN Ballet de Lorraine will remount two larger-scale pieces as part of the Northrop's jaw-droppingly-good touring lineup.

Theater-wise, there's not a whole lot that excites me on the Twin Cities' largest stages. That's because so many shows programmed by the Guthrie, the Jungle and other theaters have already debuted back East. What I eagerly await, however, are unexpectedly good performances by artists who don't send out fancy press releases. May they still find my in-box. -- Rebecca Ritzel

U.S. Bank Stadium gets second chance as concert venue with GNR

From my choice seats at U.S. Bank Stadium for the inaugural concerts by Luke Bryan and Metallica last summer, I couldn't complain. But everywhere else at the new Vikings stadium, there were issues with the sound. The summer of 2017 should be a better test of the billion-dollar sports palace as a concert facility, with shows by **Guns N' Roses** (July 30), **Coldplay** (Aug. 12) and **Justin Bieber** (Aug. 18).

While both TCF Bank Stadium and Target Field are winners for concerts, the new Vikings venue has potentially more seats — a draw for money-conscious promoters and bands. But as Bryan himself told me, enclosed stadiums are built for sports events, not for concert-quality acoustics.

Another big gig on my calendar is **Lionel Richie and Mariah Carey** March 24 at Xcel Energy Center. This will be the first proper Twin Cities concert by the pop queen who has sold 200 million albums, scored 18 No. 1 pop singles but has only performed twice here — cameos at KDWB's Last Chance Summer Dance in 1999 (where she lip-synced) and at Mal of All America on the "Today" show in 2002. -- Jon Bream

Minnesota will sizzle with classical music festivals

In August, nothing ever happens in the classical world, because all the musicians are on vacation. That was my assumption, anyway, when I moved to Minnesota from Britain two years ago. How wrong I was!

The state boasts more than one, not two, but three full-fledged festivals to make the dog days more livable. For art-song lovers, the wondrous **Source Song Festival** will rise again at venues throughout the Twin Cities, featuring world premieres by Minneapolis composers Libby Larsen and David Evan Thomas, not to mention a keynote contribution from outstanding English accompanist Julius Drake. Another August highlight will be the intrepid **Twin Cities Early Music Festival**, whose enticingly varied menu will include rare performances of "Jonas" and "Noah," two oratorios by 17th-century Italian composer Giacomo Carissimi.

For opera, I'll head north to Brainerd, where Bizet's simmering masterpiece "Carmen" spearheads the three-week **Lakes Area Music Festival**. Looks like my summers will be a lot more interesting now that I live in Minnesota. -- Terry Blain

Lorna Landvik's latest is on our must-read list

It's been 12 years since Lorna Landvik's "Patty Jane's House of Curl" — written by hand on yellow legal pads at the Nokomis Public Library — hit the bestseller list. This year, finally, there's a sequel. "**Once in a Blue Moon Lodge**," the story of Patty Jane's daughter Nora, will be published in April by the University of Minnesota Press.

Minneapolis poet Todd Boss, founder of Motionpoems, will publish his third collection, "**Tough Luck**," with W.W. Norton in June. The centerpiece of the collection is "Fragments for the 35W Bridge," 35 poems of 35 lines each, originally published in the Star Tribune in 2012, on the fifth anniversary of the I-35W bridge collapse.

And Dudley Riggs, a legend in the local theater world, has written a memoir, "**Flying Funny: My Life Without a Net**," coming in April from the University of Minnesota Press.

Fiction, poetry, memoir — what more could we hope for? -- Laurie Hertzler