

VARIETY

These Minnesota arts heroes made their mark in 2016

Here is a baker's dozen of Minnesota arts heroes who made their mark in 2016.

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Bob Dylan

CHRIS PIZZELLO - ASSOCIATED PRESS

1. Bob Dylan

Even in the year he turned 75, Dylan surprised us. He released a second consecutive album of standards, "Fallen Angels," that was remarkably superior to 2015's much acclaimed "Shadows in the Night." He gave arguably his best performance of this century in front of a crowd of 75,000 at the classic-rock Desert Trip fest in California, delivering classics such as "Ballad of a Thin Man" and "Masters of War," with clarity, passion and enduring relevance. A week later came the crowning award in his much celebrated career: the Nobel Prize for literature. The first songwriter to merit this honor, Dylan, in typical Dylan fashion, didn't show up for the ceremony. Instead, he had the U.S. ambassador to Sweden read his speech — just as so many singers have sung his lyrics.

JON BREAM

2. Joan Soranno and John Cook

The HGA architects righted a whopping wrong with their new Vineland Place entrance to Walker Art Center. It's easy to blame the Walker's bewildering layout on the 2005 Herzog and de Meuron addition, but part of the problem was buried in the hillside — a cluster of mechanicals and ductwork known as "the chiller" (or, as Walker executive director Olga Viso termed it, "a carbuncle"), parts of it dating to the Walker's long-gone 1927 home. The architects blew through that obstacle to open up the cramped corridor from the parking ramp and expand the Vineland lobby into a crossroads connecting the two Walker buildings and the adjacent Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. Soranno and Cook have brought light and air and color into a space that will truly bloom when the garden reopens in the spring.



JEFF WHEELER, STAR TRIBUNE

TIM CAMPBELL

3. Lizzo

Even though she spent a lot of the year in Los Angeles, where she co-hosts MTV's new variety show "Wonderland," the Minneapolis-reared rapper/singer kept up a high profile in town. Her feel-good-about-yourself anthem "Good as Hell" was our unofficial summer jam. Her stage know-how made big impressions at some of the year's biggest concerts, including the Prince street party outside First Avenue, Rock the Garden and Soundset, where her booty-slapping main-stage set was a slap in the face of the event's machismo past. To top it off, she faced the unenviable task of appearing on TBS' "Full Frontal With Samantha Bee" the day after the election with unequivocal grace, opening with the African-American anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Keep on lifting, Lizzo.

CHRIS RIEMENSCHNEIDER

4. Christopher Lutter-Gardella

Two magical North Woods creatures took up residence near the Minneapolis Convention Center this summer, thanks to this Minneapolis puppeteer. Lutter-Gardella led a six-person team in constructing a two-story wolf and an equally enormous moose for June's Northern Spark Festival. Built on sturdy metal skeletons with coats of recycled plastic and interior lights to lend a funky evening glow, they practically begged for physical interaction. Kids took pleasure in pedaling the bike-powered moose, which snorted with every pump. Adults seemed to prefer the pulley-powered howling wolf. Art-minded families were delighted when Lutter-Gardella's brilliant animals stuck around for fall and then reappeared at Holidazzle this winter. Here's hoping they find more urban habitats in 2017.

CHRISTY DESMITH

5. Randy Reyes

In a community of principled, passionate artists, Reyes stands out. The juggler-trained actor is an expert juggler of sorts. As an artistic director, he has broadened the repertoire and mission of Mu Performing Arts while chairing the national Consortium of Asian American Theaters and Artists. In 2016 he directed Mia Chung's "You for Me for You," about stereotypes and commonalities between North Korea and the West; Victor Maog's "tot," about a Filipino immigrant's escapist fantasy into the world of wrestling, and Carla Ching's irreverent love story "The Two Kids That Blow S--- Up." Reyes also acted in "tot" and played the male lead opposite Christina Baldwin in "The Oldest Boy," Sarah Ruhl's moving play at the Jungle.

ROHAN PRESTON

6. Steve Hendrickson

Hendrickson has been one of my favorite actors since 2000, when he played Roy Cohn in Pillsbury House's "Angels in America." Hendrickson has done just fine in dozens of theaters here and nationally but hadn't performed at the Guthrie Theater since "Anthony and Cleopatra" in 2002. So it was good to see him in two substantial roles on the thrust stage in 2016. He played a cranky old doctor in "Harvey" and then a cranky old Navy captain in Joseph Haj's directorial debut, "South Pacific." His work as Capt. George Brackett was terrific. At one point, he made an absolute event — an occasion — of standing up from his desk to confront Lt. Cable. It was maybe the most delicious 15 seconds of physical acting you will ever see. Good to see Hendrickson still has some snap in his legs.



COURTESY GUTHRIE THEATER

Steve Hendrickson.

7. Matthias Maute

Three months ago, Maute began his tenure as artistic director of the Bach Society of Minnesota, and already he has administered a short, sharp shock to the venerable ensemble's music making. His Bach performances have fizzed with verve and energy. And his virtuoso flute and recorder playing lends a new dimension to concerts. Maute has big plans, including two performances of Bach's Easter Oratorio in April. Fasten your seat belts: He is a risk taker, and the results can be breathlessly exciting.

TERRY BLAIN

8. Louie Anderson

If they're handing out trophies for artistic comeback of the year, usher this Minnesota native to the front of the line. He'll gladly make room on a mantel that includes an Emmy and a Critics' Choice award for his return to prime-time television. FX's "Baskets," in which he taps into his mom's passive-aggressive nature, may have put him back on the A list (it returns for a second season Jan. 19), but he continued to return home, capping his victory lap with his traditional New Year's Eve show in the Twin Cities.

NEAL JUSTIN

9. Dale Johnson

The year was exciting, entertaining and enriching for local opera lovers. And for that we can thank Minnesota Opera's artistic director for the past 22 years. Johnson struck a superlative balance between edgy newness and crowd-pleasing classics with his programming choices for 2016. First came the sold-out run of "The Shining," a critically acclaimed world premiere based on the 1977 Stephen King bestseller. Then came the company's November production of "Das Rheingold," a rare treat for Wagnerians in the Upper Midwest.

CHRISTY DESMITH

10. Susana di Palma

The founder of Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theatre always thrives on the passion and power of her chosen dance form, but she created an especially potent show in 2016. Last spring she premiered "Lorca's Women" at Cowles Center. Inspired by the female characters from Federico García Lorca's poetry collection "Romance de la Pena Negra," Di Palma summoned forth the artist's voice, silenced during the Spanish Civil War. She also served up fiery dancing and sublime music, inspiring shouts of "olé!" from the crowd. "Lorca's Women" proved one of the year's most memorable dance shows, with Di Palma serving as medium between history and the present.

CAROLINE PALMER

11. Donte Collins

Sometimes when Collins writes a poem, it takes weeks — or months. Other times, the words come fast, as when he heard about yet another shooting of a young black man by a police officer. He wrote "what the dead king of heart" in 15 minutes, and it won him the most promising young poet award from the American Academy of American Poets, a prestigious honor that goes annually to a poet under age 23. Collins, a student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, plans to use the \$1,000 honorarium to publish his first chapbook.

LAURIE HERTZEL

12. Minnesota muralists

Murals helped Minnesotans think and mourn, making sense of a dark year. In the days following Prince's death, a pair of purple murals popped up, the icon's doe eyes at their center. One, on the side of a Chanhassen movie theater, was painted by an artist from elsewhere but embraced by Minnesota fans. In north Minneapolis, Juxtaposition Arts started its new mural in June, not long after the deaths of Prince and Muhammad Ali. As they were working, Philando Castile was killed by a police officer. Artists incorporated neighbors' photographs of their heroes and loved ones into the mural, using collages of those images to create beams of light radiating from the center, where a black woman and her child stand. The community had experienced "a lot of loss," said Roger Cummings, Juxtaposition's chief cultural producer. "There needs to be a lot of remembering."

JENNA ROSS

13. Tom Rassiour

You'd think the Minneapolis Institute of Art could take it easy after a crazy busy centennial in 2015 that felt like a 365-day birthday party. Instead, the museum doubled down with the massive exhibit "Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation." What could have been a dutiful history lesson was brought to vivid life by curator Rassiour, who spent three years working with German officials to gather a once-in-a-lifetime treasure trove of art and artifacts. The institute has become a magnet for Lutherans from around the country, with church groups even breaking into song upon seeing such objects as Luther's writing table. Normally closed on Mondays, the museum has expanded its hours to meet demand for the show, which closes Jan. 15.

TIM CAMPBELL

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