

Nourishing Our Culture

The cultural spotlight will soon shine on the nation's last major metro area to open a signature performing arts center.

By Kevin Fritz

It will be magnificent, astonishing to many who have never experienced a modern-day performing arts center. Come November, the epicenter of the arts and entertainment world will be **Downtown Orlando** as the long-awaited and much anticipated Dr. P. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts opens its doors.

Following galas and special grand-opening events, November 20 marks the beginning of official programming with "Georgia on my Mind: Celebrating Ray Charles," part one of the critically acclaimed four-part Jazz Roots Series. In December, The Phantom of the Opera kicks off the center's Broadway series, followed by the fine art of ballet with the venerable classic The Nutcracker, December 19-21.

New Home for Artists

It is indeed Orlando's time to shine as a cultural center. Of the 30 largest metropolitan markets in the United States, Orlando is the only major city without a signature performing arts center. This gives Orlando a major boost in attracting national touring shows and concerts, many of which have opted not to add The City Beautiful to their itineraries because of existing space and venue conditions.

Built in phases, the Dr. Phillips Center will open with two performance

halls — the 2,700-seat Walt Disney Theater and the more intimate, 300-seat Alexis and Jim Pugh Theater. Phase two calls for a third 1,700-seat multi-form theater, the highest tech venue of them all. Also referred to as an acoustic theater and future home for symphonies and operas, it will feature shifting seats and a convertible stage. The orchestra level will be able to transform from a pit to a flat floor. All Broadway shows and the Orlando Ballet will be performed in the Walt Disney Theater.

For **Daniel Benavides** of College Park, the anticipation of dancing at the new performing arts center has been building for months since he learned his company would be the first to perform ballet in the new facility when the curtain opens on The Nutcracker. "I am so excited to be one of the first to dance on that stage," he says. "I keep driving by and looking over at the center."

Benavides, who has been with the Orlando Ballet for eight years, has danced in performing arts centers of this magnitude before — the likes of the Kennedy Arts Center and the San Francisco Opera House — and says the larger stage will allow the company more room to travel and the new floor will be easier on their bodies. He also looks forward to feeding off the energy of the larger audiences at the Walt Disney Theater. While the new center's role as a tourist destination is unknown,

The acoustic theater, featuring shifting seats and a convertible stage, will be the home for symphonies and orchestras.

COURTESY OF DR. P. PHILLIPS CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



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weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs. The center's outdoor centerpiece, the CNL Arts Plaza, spans one city block and will be able to accommodate up to 3,000 people. "The CNL Arts Plaza will be the region's town square," says Ramsberger. "Whether it's seeing a local artist or just enjoying friends, this is a limitless space designed to welcome the community."

Beyond the Center

While the Dr. P. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts will take center stage as the area's cultural hub when it opens, other Central Florida art venues and festivals still warrant attention.

The Garden Theatre hosts concerts, plays, and movies year-round in **Winter Garden**, and in October, it co-hosts Music Fest, a three-day, indoor-outdoor party held throughout the city.

In **Winter Park**, one of the oldest and most distinguished collections of art in Florida is on display at the Cornell Fine Arts Museum on the Rollins College campus. Winter Park's Morse Museum is famed for housing the world's most comprehensive collection of works by Louis Comfort Tiffany. The stain-glass lamps and windows are magnificent. Nearby, the Orlando Museum of Art presents 10-12 annual exhibitions.

Get a glimpse into the future of stage musicians as the Florida Symphony Youth Orchestra delights audiences at venues throughout the area, including the new Grove at Mead Botanical Garden in Winter Park, an open-air pavilion designed for musical performance, theatrical productions, film viewings, educational programming and community gatherings.

For some hands-on fun, The Art Room in **Windermere** is a teaching art studio offering weekly classes, workshops and private/semi-private lessons upon request.

Please see our sidebar for some of the more popular local arts and entertainment happenings and start planning your cultural calendar. **L**

For more information about the Dr. P. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts and other local venues, visit our website at CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.

Art Around Town

GLOBAL PEACE FILM FESTIVAL

September 16-21

Featuring films from around the world and educational panels that highlight the power of film as related to global peace issues.

PeaceFilmFest.org

WINTER PARK AUTUMN ART FESTIVAL

October 11-12

This community-oriented sidewalk show presents quality visual art, live entertainment, and is the only juried art show to feature Florida artists exclusively.

WinterPark.org

WINTER SPRINGS FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

October 18-19

Featuring 125 fine artists, live music and tastings of German-inspired foods and German beer.

WSFOTA.org

CULTURE FEST 2014

November 1-2

This fusion of food, art, music, street performers and film from around the world is presented by Florida Film Academy and the City of Winter Garden, benefitting youth in the arts.

[Facebook.com/WinterGardenCultureFest](https://www.facebook.com/WinterGardenCultureFest)

FESTIVAL OF TREES

November 15-23

Browse designer-decorated trees, wreaths and gingerbread creations; holidays vignettes; and get inspired with drawings of beautiful tabletop designs. Proceeds benefit the Orlando Museum of Art.

OMArt.org/programs/festival-trees

as word spreads of Orlando's commitment to the arts, Benavides believes visitors will make it a point to take in a show when they visit. "Orlando is now a big arts town," he says.

Community and Educational Center

The \$500 million center is a massive nine-acre vision that includes an outdoor plaza with performance space, rehearsal rooms, educational programming space and a community facility. Restaurants and shops will complete the community-gathering-place vibe.

Kathy Ramsberger, Dr. Phillips Center president, says the facility was designed to be more than performance space; it also focuses on arts education programming and community outreach. "Our arts education programming will open doors, minds, worlds and endless possibilities with outreach and engagement initiatives for every life," she says. "We will serve the Central Florida community in and through collaborative partnerships from stage to classroom, hospitals to senior centers and community groups to underserved populations."

Its 10,000-square-foot educational facility includes classroom and performance space, which the University of Central Florida will take full advantage of by giving its performing arts students the thrill of performing in a major arts venue.

The majority of the center comprises rental areas for banquets, conferences,