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FALL ARTS GUIDE 2021

Highlights of Bay Area Theatre and Dance to See This Fall

By [Nicole Gluckstern](#) Aug 30[Save Article](#)

Epiphany Dance members Kim Ip and Lydia Clinton. (Amani Photography)

When the first wave of COVID-19 closures hit in March 2020, nobody could predict exactly when (or indeed, if) arts spaces would be able to open their doors again to in-person performance. Initially it seemed as if reopening might happen within three weeks. Then another month. Then another. And here we are, seventeen months later, when a large number of venues are still dark or operating at limited capacity.



With the rise of the delta variant, performing arts spaces have had to navigate this year's reopening with an abundance of caution and maximum flexibility. In practical terms, this has meant fluctuating performance dates, last-minute cancellations and postponements, and the understanding on both sides of the stage that things could change at any moment.

Despite this, the artistic imperative to create, communicate, and connect remains strong in the Bay Area. With the caveat that dates, locations, and COVID-19 protocols might change between now and showtime, here's a roundup of essential fall performances to put on your calendar.

Reminder: *COVID precautions remain in flux. Proof of vaccination is a requirement for many indoor events. Before making plans, and again before arrival, be sure to check event websites for the latest protocols.*



The ensemble from a 2019 production of 'I Too Sing America.' (Natalia Perez)

New Roots Theatre Festival

Brava Theater Center, San Francisco

Oct. 16 and 17

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Not content to welcome audiences back with a single play, San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company (SFBATCO) has instead curated an entire festival. The inaugural New Roots Theatre Festival includes an Afrofuturist play in verse by Aidaa Peerzada, a musical centering the East Bay's Betty Reid Soskin (the oldest living park ranger in the United States), a performance from SF's Cuicacalli Ballet Folklórico, and short pieces produced by Black-led organizations including Lorraine Hansberry Theatre Company, African-American Shakespeare Company, AfroSolo, and PUSH Dance. (The companies are organized into "pods" that perform in tandem, with repeating shows, so audiences can see the whole program over the course of the weekend.)

Additionally, SFBATCO will revive their award-winning *I, Too, Sing America*. First conceptualized in 2018 by music director Othello Jefferson, *ITSA* sets works by notable artists of color such as Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Frances Chung and Beyoncé to music and movement. This timely revival includes new materials for 2021 while celebrating the long history of revolutionary poetry and prose as an American tradition.



Performers for 'Radius' at the CounterPulse Festival. (Robbie Sweeny)

The CounterPulse Festival

Various venues; also online

Sept. 9–18

The rescheduled CounterPulse Festival—featuring performances, panels, poetry, film, and workshops—comes to both physical and virtual space in San Francisco, Oakland, and even the Santa Cruz Mountains. As an artistic home to many of the Bay Area's most imaginative multidisciplinary performers, CounterPulse's focus on embodied liberation and communal arts practice lends itself to festival mode.

Some standouts include new work from FACT/SF, a facilitated conversation between Bay Area-based “Queeratorial collectives” entitled “Fuck the System,” an embodied divination workshop with Amara Tabor Smith, and a film series inspired by the writings of Jean Genet and Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi, instigated by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and partially narrated by his alter ego Faluda Islam. The weeklong festival culminates with *Radius*, an improvisational outdoor performance exploring power dynamics and collaborative energies, featuring dance artists, experimental electronic musicians, and CounterPulse's artistic and executive director Julie Phelps. Pre-registration is required, and proof of vaccination and masks are required for indoor events.



'The Displaced' stars Troy Rockett and Jordan Don. (Cheshire Isaacs)

'The Displaced'

Potrero Stage, San Francisco

Sept. 9–Oct. 2

Another play postponed by the pandemic, *The Displaced* by Isaac Gómez is a two-hander horror story with a solid reputation for inspiring unease. When artistic couple Marisa and Lev move into their new apartment, their quotidian squabbling can't distract from a series of unexplainable events unfolding around them. But are they being haunted by their own fragmented dysfunction, or by a tormented spirit with cause to linger?

Recently rewritten with a pair of alternate endings, Gómez' nervy script gradually reveals itself to be about much more than a few flying tchotchkes; it also addresses gentrification, generational wealth, racial inequity, and displacement. Featuring Jordan Don and Troy Rockett as the troubled protagonists—with direction by Mina Morita and Karina Gutiérrez, and special effects design by Devon LaBelle—Crowded Fire's production of *The Displaced* offers both a savvy indictment of our time, and a seasonally appropriate scary story. Masks and proof of vaccination are required, while select shows allow a proof of negative COVID test instead (check website for dates).



Abbey Lee in 'Galatea.' (Jennifer Griego)

'Galatea'

Spreckels Performing Arts Center, Rohnert Park
Sept. 3–19

One of the many shows forced to postpone in March 2020 was *Galatea*, a science fiction play by North Bay playwright David Templeton. Set in the year 2167, the play follows the revival and reintegration process of an android traveler known as Seventy-One. The only survivor from the *Galatea*, a long-destroyed space shuttle, Seventy-One is encouraged by a pair of amiable doctors to remember the events that led them to escaping the fate that befell the rest of their crewmates. Nothing is quite what it seems, and several key plot twists stretch the narrative in unexpected directions.

At the heart of the play is a thoughtful examination of what it means to be human in an era where synthetic lifeforms predominate. What are the characteristics that can be shared with our AI comrades, and what will always be the sole provenance of “organics?” Templeton’s smartly constructed fantasy won an honorable mention from the Will Glickman Award panel (of which I am a member) in 2020, and is finally receiving its well-deserved stage premiere. Proof of vaccination or recent negative COVID test, and masking, is required.



'The Immortal Reckoning' with Peaches Christ (center) and ensemble members. (Jose A. Guzman)

'The Immortal Reckoning'

The Old Mint, San Francisco

Sept. 23–Oct. 31

As fans of horror movies can attest, sometimes the best way to escape the stresses of real-life horror (such as, say, a raging pandemic and an overheated planet) is through a good old-fashioned haunting. When longtime horror aficionado Joshua Grannell a.k.a. Peaches Christ first debuted their collaborative brainchild *The Terror Vault* in 2018, it ushered in a new standard of haunted attraction for the Bay Area. It's a standard certain to be upheld in this year's production: *The Immortal Reckoning*.

Using the imposing architectural features of the old San Francisco Mint—stone walls, vaulted ceilings, dusty chandeliers, and a subterranean warren of interconnected rooms—costumed characters will guide audiences through a rare collection of supernatural artifacts, rumored to be conduits to an “immortal” realm. Levels of interactivity can be opted into (and out of, should you change your mind) and limits are thankfully respected. Still, expect to be menaced, mocked, questioned, sniffed and startled by all manner of homicidal creatures while jostling your way through a disorienting maze designed by the diabolically talented David Flower. Masks and proof of vaccination are required, with no exceptions or refunds.



Bruns Ampitheater. (Zhanara Baisalova)

'The Winter's Tale'

Bruns Ampitheater, Orinda

Sept. 1–26

Nestled in the Orinda hills and open to the darkening sky and emerging stars, the Bruns Amphitheater provides a stellar setting for Shakespearean fare—and for audiences wary about returning to indoor theater. A romance wrapped in a tale of abandonment and loss, *The Winter's Tale* was last performed at the Bruns in 2013. Emphasizing renewal, redemption and hope, this fresh adaptation from artistic director Eric Ting and dramaturg Phillipa Kelly should provide a welcome escape and a pertinent reflection. Proof of vaccination is not required; masks are required for unvaccinated audience members and all other patrons when not “actively eating or drinking.”



Kirsten Millan and Vanessa Sanchez from La Mezcla. (Amani Photography)

Dance it Out

Accustomed to creating site-responsive works to suit a variety of (often) non-traditional spaces and occasions, Bay Area choreographers have demonstrated their innate resiliency time and time again. This ability to adapt and innovate has allowed many artists in the dance community to find ways to create together, even during the darkest days of the pandemic.

'Meet Us Quickly With Your Mercy'

CounterPulse, San Francisco

Oct. 14–17

In Flyaway Productions' *Meet Us Quickly With Your Mercy*, artistic director Jo Kreiter grapples with the historical throughline of slavery leading to the present-day mass incarceration of Black Americans, as well as with a new rise in trans-Atlantic anti-Jewish sentiment and white nationalism. Using aerial apparatus fashioned to resemble cages suspended above the ground, and music composed by the late Jewlia Eisenberg, Flyaway Productions performs this second part of their ongoing Decarceration Trilogy with the walls of CounterPulse's Tenderloin building as their backdrop.

'Bacchae Before'

Joe Goode Annex, San Francisco; also online

Live performance Sept. 28–Oct. 2; online Oct. 2

In *Bacchae Before*, Hope Mohr Dance ties together the tragedy of Euripides' *The Baccae* (via Anne Carson's notable translation) with the modern-day violence of gender reveal parties. Performed by Belinda He, Wiley Naman Strasser, Karla Quintero, and Silk Worm—with puppetry by C. Michael Chin, and additional text and co-direction provided by Maxe Crandall—*Bacchae Before* distills and refracts a classical text of frenzy and filicide through a trans-centered, gender-affirming perspective.

Trolley Dances

Throughout San Francisco

Oct. 16–17

With the welcome return of Trolley Dances, curated by Kim Epifano's Epiphany Dance Theater, audiences will ride the K and L lines from the Castro to the East Cut, encountering short vignettes from Babatunji & Charmaine, Epiphany Dance Theater, Joe Landini & Dancers, La Mezcla, Parangal Dance Company, and Rising Rhythm. More than a celebration of public transportation, Trolley Dances is a transformative interrogation of public space and the porous boundaries between performer and spectator.



Performers from Circus Bella. (Ron Scherl)

Circus Freaks

Need something to take the kids to? Maybe just in need of a little whimsy? Catch these circus performances—one outdoors, one indoors.

Circus Bella

Various locations

Aug. 26-Oct. 3

Having kicked off at Oakland's DeFremery Park on Aug. 26, Circus Bella's *Humorous* will embark on a free, 12-performance tour of parks and public spaces through Oct. 3. A one-ring, people-powered circus, Circus Bella eschews circus animals in favor of mainstays such as aerialists, acrobats, and clowns. Directed by company founder Abigail Munn, *Humorous* features some of the Bay Area's most prolific circus performers: creative clowning duo Jamie Coventry and Natasha Kaluza, queer circus icon Toni Cannon, and aerialist Dwoira Galilia.

'Dear San Francisco'

Club Fugazi, San Francisco

Ongoing starting Sept. 22

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For those ready to brave the great indoors, Club Fugazi in North Beach hosts the circus-y love-letter-to-the-city *Dear San Francisco*. At the longtime home of the now-shuttered Beach Blanket Babylon, the circus collective 7 Fingers boasts SF-raised founders, an immensely talented international cast, and some of the Bay Area's best designers—including Jake Rodriguez, Alexander V. Nichols, and Keiko Shimosato Carreiro. Masks and proof of vaccination with ID required for all patrons. Unvaccinated children 5-11 may attend with vaccinated adult(s).

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FOOD

Cult Favorite Taiwanese Pop-Up Lands a Standalone Restaurant in Emeryville

By [Luke Tsai](#)  Aug 26

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The new restaurant will serve ambitious, elegant dishes such as Taiwanese-style lion's head meatballs. (*Good-to-Eat Dumplings*)

When Angie Lin and Tony Tung first broke into the Bay Area's burgeoning brewery-based pop-up scene about three years ago, all the cool craft breweries were slinging burgers or tacos or nachos. No one seemed to be repping what they believed to be an equally transcendent pairing: craft beer and handmade, “craft” dumplings. **Good-to-Eat Dumplings** stepped in to fill the void.

Eventually, the wife-and-wife duo settled into a permanent gig popping up out of the kitchen at **Original Pattern Brewing**, in Jack London Square, and slowly built up an avid cult following for its distinctly Taiwanese style of dumplings and bao, which also showcased fresh Northern California produce.

Now, they will have a standalone restaurant of their own. Opening toward the end of 2021 in the former Yuzu Ramen & Broffee location on 65th Street in Emeryville, the new Good-to-Eat Dumplings will be one of a small number of full-fledged Taiwanese restaurants in the Oakland and Berkeley area—one of the only places, in fact, where diners will be able to sit down for a family-style Taiwanese meal.



The pop-up's most famous dish is probably its long potstickers. (*Good-to-Eat Dumplings*)

As with so many businesses, the turning point was the pandemic. Prior to that, Good-to-Eat had stayed fairly one-minded in its focus on dumplings with seasonal fillings; its most famous dish was its long potstickers. But once shelter in place hit and Good-to-Eat shifted to doing takeout exclusively, Lin says it only made sense to offer more complete meals: rice plates, noodle dishes and a variety of weekly specials. They served Taiwanese-style lion's head meatballs, crispy fried pork chops and an appetizer they stylized as “**Taiwanese caprese**”—a classic preparation from Tainan that combined ripe heirloom tomatoes, sugar and a gingery soy-sauce glaze.

Regulars were immediately enamored with the new dishes, and, as in-person dining slowly ramped up again, the restaurant stuck with the expanded menu. On any given weekend, Lin says, the dining room would fill up with families across three generations. Each group would order a spread of dishes sumptuous enough to cover the table and then some.

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“This is really what we love. This is why we are doing this,” Lin says. “We figured out that our food has this ability to bring people together like this.”



Chef Tony Tung plates up an order of Taiwanese cabbage rolls. (*Good-to-Eat Dumplings*)

The problem was that their brewery kitchen was set up in the typical makeshift pop-up way. All of the dishes had to be prepped ahead of time at a commercial kitchen in downtown Oakland, which meant they weren't able to make the menu as expansive and ambitious as they wanted it to be. Every time they added a new dish, they had to remove some other customer favorite.

The chefs' vision for the new Emeryville location, then, is to serve an even larger selection of traditional Taiwanese dishes beyond dumplings and bao, focusing on the kind of dishes that are both homey and elegant—and special enough that you'd normally only encounter them at a banquet or celebration meal. As Lin puts it, "We love to showcase how delicate traditional Taiwanese cooking is."

The aforementioned lion's head meatballs, for instance, are stewed with just napa cabbage—no water—to yield an intensely flavorful broth. Lin and Tung will serve a chicken soup that gets slow-cooked in a clay pot for 24 hours. They'll serve Taiwanese-style stuffed cabbage rolls. And they'll be able to more regularly serve their labor-intensive pork belly gua bao, which include mustard leaves that they ferment in-house.

At the same time, the restaurant will continue to serve all of its staples: the dumplings, the noodles, the various small plates.

At its core, then, the restaurant will be a place where customers will be able to sit down and enjoy a multi-course, family-style Taiwanese meal—a real rarity in this part of the East Bay, where almost all of the **existing Taiwanese restaurants** focus on street foods or bento boxes.

Taiwanese Breakfast Sandwiches Make Long-Awaited Debut at East Bay Strip Mall

KQED's Ultimate Guide to Taiwanese Restaurants in the Bay

The Bay Area's Taiwanese Food Scene Comes Into Its Own

Meanwhile, Lin says she and Tung have formed a deep connection with their customers in the Jack London area over the past three years, which is why they have no intention of leaving. Instead, they'll continue to run the pop-up spot as "Baohous by GTE," with a streamlined menu focused on sandwich-style steamed bao during the week and a callback to their original dumpling pop-up menu on Sundays.

In many ways, the restaurant's trajectory mirrors the **growing mainstream embrace of the Bay Area's Taiwanese food scene** in general. When they were first starting out, Lin and Tung were afraid that if they even included the word "Taiwanese" in their branding, customers would just wind up feeling confused. Now, Lin says she's definitely going to make sure people know that Good-to-Eat Dumplings is Taiwanese.

"Now everyone has much more awareness," Lin says. "Food from Taiwan is a category that customers want to explore."



*If all goes according to plan, Good-to-Eat Dumplings will open at 1298 65th Street in Emeryville as early as November 2021. For updates, follow the restaurant on **Instagram**.*

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