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Cover: Monterey Jazz Festival On Tour’s Cécile McLorin Salvant
Photo by Hector Perez
Escher Quartet’s
Danbi Um
Photo by Ah-Hyun Cho
We are pleased to share with you this annual report for our 2018–2019 season.

Thanks to the support we received from Penn State—and from our many patrons, members, sponsors, and supporters—we brought to our campus and community artists from around the world to give thrilling performances and participate in a host of engaging residency activities for all ages.

I am particularly proud that we highlighted and celebrated the many women artists and creators that were connected to the season. Our season theme, *I Am Woman*, inspired others to link similar programming to this concept, for which we are grateful.

Our community support initiative was a *Warm Hearts* clothing drive. In partnership with Skills of Central Pennsylvania, we collected new cold weather clothing that was distributed to community members in need. Thanks to the many who donated.

Our student engagement program continued to flourish. Of particular note is the development of IllumiNATION, a student-driven and arts-based creative festival of illuminated objects that will come to full fruition in the 2019–2020 season. Get ready to experience an amazing spectacle of art and light.

Those projects and much more are included in this report. What’s most challenging to capture are the many memorable moments created by artists, in the theatre or as they engaged in programs throughout our community. Special thanks goes to the artists who shared their talents, touched many, and reminded us of the power of the arts to uplift our lives.

Enjoy!

George Trudeau
Director, Center for the Performing Arts at Penn State
Monterey Jazz Festival On Tour’s Melissa Aldana
vision

Enriching lives through inspiring experiences

mission

The Center for the Performing Arts provides a context, through artistic connections, to the human experience. By bringing artists and audiences together, we spark discovery of passion, inspiration, and inner truths. We are a motivator for creative thinking and examination of our relationship with the world.

core values

Arts Leadership
We believe artistic distinction and exceptional experiences are the cornerstones of the Center for the Performing Arts and are integral to our position of national leadership.

Committed Stewardship
We ensure fiscal health, sustain superior facilities, create self-sustaining systems, and support the reduction of our environmental footprint through our business model, practices, and policies.

Creative Innovation
We seek and promote innovative, provocative, and risk-taking ideas and creative approaches across our organization.

People First
We value everyone who benefits from and contributes to the Center for the Performing Arts. We take pride in fostering an environment of mutual respect, teamwork, and high ethical standards in which everyone’s involvement is honored, supported, and appreciated.

Service Focused
We provide our constituencies and partners with a consistently high level of support, access, and opportunities ensuring the greatest possible inclusiveness, diversity, and enrichment for those we serve.
Season theme develops ‘organically’
in response to the times

According to the late singer and activist Nina Simone, an artist’s duty is to reflect the times. Perhaps, then, an art center’s duty is to provide a space to share those messages. During the 2018–2019 season, Center for the Performing Arts presentations focused on a theme—“I Am Woman”—in response to the world in which we live.

A number of researchers, historians, and media outlets declared 2018 the year of the woman—a response to the rising number of women running for political office, embracing activism, and making their voices heard out of a desire to be represented and respected. Before and after the 2018 elections, women contributed their talents to the realm of politics and community to assert their power in the fight against indignity and injustice.

But for women artists around the world, the performing arts also provide an opportunity for self-empowerment, which often improves one’s economic, educational, and social spheres.

“Having a season-long theme is not something that we have strived for in the past, but this season, the idea developed very organically,” says Marketing and Communications Director Laura Sullivan. “I began to see a common thread weaving through the events. The more research I did on the artists included in the season, the more I discovered a rich tapestry of strong, brave, compelling, fearless, creative, confident women in the arts.”

The thematic concept also fit well with the second season of the center’s Diversity and Inclusion Collaborative, which aimed to introduce audiences to a variety of cultures, art forms, and ways of thinking that embrace the unfamiliar.

Starting with the season-opening performance—jazz vocalist Veronica Swift with The Emmet Cohen Trio—the schedule featured women of all ages, cultures, genres, and disciplines in leadership and supporting artist roles. Much of the
A “brave” girl is one of hundreds of patrons and visiting artists joining the chorus of expressions in front of the *I Am Woman* backdrop displayed at Eisenhower Auditorium for selected performances in the 2018–2019 season. Photo by Jacob Iwinski.
“an artist’s duty is to reflect the times”

Nina Simone

schedule highlighted artists and performances that touched on a woman’s experience.

Key events included dance theatre company Urban Bush Women’s performance of *Hair and Other Stories*, which examined perceptions of body, race, beauty, gender, and the struggles associated with those aspects of being a black woman. Ballet Hispánico, a dance troupe founded by Tina Ramirez and dedicated to exploring Latino culture, performed three works choreographed by women artists. The national tour of *BEAUTIFUL*

*Ballet Hispánico* performs Linea Recta

Photo by Paula Lobo
followed the story of Carole King and revealed the obstacles she faced on her road to recording top-forty hits and finding her own voice.

"From musicians; to vocalists and composers; to choreographers, dancers, artistic directors, and writers; what I found in front of me was a list of women who use artistic expression to speak up, stand up, and tackle issues of social justice, race, equality, gender, and identity," Sullivan says. The marketing campaign was multifaceted and extended beyond traditional print and digital advertising methods. It included social media posts; feature interviews with a number of visiting artists plus visionaries in the worlds of pop music, literature, and science; informational posters and signage; and a photo opportunity for patrons to show their support.

The department’s efforts earned the team a mixed-media campaign Gold Award at the 2019 Bracket Awards, hosted by Central Pennsylvania Creative Professionals and judged by design and communications experts from New York City.
Patrons enjoy “speaking their minds” while engaging with the I Am Woman backdrop at Eisenhower Auditorium. A selection of the photos were on display in the Eisenhower lounge. Photos by Jacob Iwinski.
## Presentations

Each performance was in Eisenhower Auditorium, unless indicated as having been in Schwab Auditorium (SA) or Pasquerilla Spiritual Center (PSC).

### SEPTEMBER

**Veronica Swift**  
*with The Emmet Cohen Trio*  
Thursday, September 20 (SA)

**Cantus**  
*Alone Together*  
Tuesday, September 25 (PSC)

### OCTOBER

**Cirque Éloize**  
*HOTEL*  
Wednesday, October 3

**Joshua Bell**  
*with Sam Haywood*  
Thursday, October 11

**Ballet Hispánico**  
Wednesday, October 17

**Darcy James Argue’s Secret Society**  
Tuesday, October 23

**Escher String Quartet**  
Gilles Vonsattel, pianist  
Tuesday, October 30 (SA)

### NOVEMBER

**SOMETHING ROTTEN!**  
Wednesday, November 7

*Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly*  
Dallas Children’s Theater  
Sunday, November 11

**Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain, and Edgar Meyer**  
*with special guest Rakesh Chaurasia*  
Wednesday, November 14

**Soweto Gospel Choir**  
*Songs of the Free*  
Celebrating the Centenary of Nelson Mandela  
Tuesday, November 27

### JANUARY

**FINDING NEVERLAND**  
Wednesday, January 23

**BODYTRAFFIC**  
Saturday, January 26

**Regina Carter • Simply Ella**  
Thursday, January 31 (SA)
FEBRUARY

Sounds of China
Tuesday, February 5 (SA)

Me ... Jane
The Dreams and Adventures of Young Jane Goodall
Sunday, February 10

Sybarite5
Outliers
Wednesday, February 13 (SA)

BEAUTIFUL
THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL
Tuesday, February 19
Wednesday, February 20
Thursday, February 21
Friday, February 22
Saturday, February 23 (matinee and evening)
Sunday, February 24

Czech National Symphony Orchestra
100 Years of Leonard Bernstein
John Mauceri, conductor
Isabel Leonard, mezzo-soprano
Wednesday, February 27

Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra
Tales of Two Cities: The Leipzig-Damascus Coffee House
Elisa Citterio, music director
Thursday, February 28 (SA)

MARCH

Urban Bush Women
Hair & Other Stories
Thursday, March 14

Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour
featuring Cécile McLorin Salvant, Bria Skonberg, Melissa Aldana, Christian Sands, Yasushi Nakamura, and Jamison Ross
Friday, March 22

THE KING AND I
Thursday, March 28

APRIL

Dreamers’ Circus
Wednesday, April 3 (SA)

KINKY BOOTS
Tuesday, April 9
Wednesday, April 10

Sarah Bockel in BEAUTIFUL
Photo by Matthew Murphy
ticket sales

tickets sold: 32,320

tickets distributed: 34,659

performances: 32

Penn State student attendance: 32%
We are grateful for the opportunity to provide these experiences to central Pennsylvania school children thanks to support from the McQuaide Blasko Endowment and the Honey and Bill Jaffe Endowment for Audience Development.

The return of Dallas Children’s Theater, one of the country’s most highly regarded theatre companies producing work for children, made a strong showing with a sellout performance of *Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly*, an adaptation of three best-selling children’s books by Penn State alumna Doreen Cronin. South Africa’s Soweto Gospel Choir was an all-ages performance that had the kids energized and uplifted. The wonderful Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences on Tour production of *Me … Jane* told the story of a young Jane Goodall in operatic, yet easily understood, dialogue.

Due to the temporary inability of one of the three artists in the show to perform, *Night Train 57, A Sensory-Friendly Comic Folk Opera*, which had been scheduled as a School-Time Matinee for April 2019, had to be rescheduled for the 2019–20 season.

---

**School-Time Matinees**

**School-Time Presentations**

*Attendance is noted above each listing*

---

**Diary of a Worm, a Spider, and a Fly**

*Dallas Children’s Theater*

Monday, November 12

(sold out)
Honey and Bill Jaffe Endowment for Audience Development funds supported the cost of the direct-mail postcards and the shipment of season information to schools in the region. Additionally, twenty schools (total number that requested subsidy) were reimbursed for 75 percent of their total field trip costs thanks to the endowment.
Presentations and Participation

Total Events: 83
all events in all supported venues

Total Attendance: 66,201
all public events in Eisenhower and Schwab auditoriums

Attendance by Groups: 5,055
Center for the Performing Arts presentations

Center for the Performing Arts Presentations: 25

Student-Sponsored Events: 7

University Presentations: 16

Academic Presentations: 17

Community Events: 7
Nittany Valley Symphony (1), Performing Arts School of Central Pennsylvania (2), Universal Ballet Competition (2), Shake the Ground Dance Competition (1), and MindBodyArt School of Dance (1)
The Center for the Performing Arts organizational budget totaled $4,825,060. Fifty-eight percent of revenues were earned and contributed through tickets sales and services, facility and equipment rentals, performance program advertising, concession sales, fundraising, grants, and endowments.
George Trudeau
Director and Associate Clinical Professor,
College of Arts and Architecture

Lea Asbell-Swanger
Assistant Director

Annie Doncsecz
Finance Director

Jara Dorsey-Lash
Associate Director of Development

Tracy Noll
Sales and Development Services Director

Laura Sullivan
Marketing and Communications Director

Amy Dupain Vashaw
Audience and Program Development Director

Shannon Arney
Assistant Ticket Manager

Erin Baskin
Graphic Designer

Erik Baxter
Multimedia Specialist

Deanna Beamer
Assistant Finance Director

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Group Sales and Donor Relations Manager

Aimee Crihfield
Contracts/Logistics Coordinator

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Hope Falk
Student Engagement Manager

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Assistant to the Director

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Events Manager

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Ticket Manager

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Associate Director for Arts Advancement,
College of Arts and Architecture

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Production Supervisor

Heather Mannion
Marketing Strategy Specialist

Joi McKenzie
Downtown Ticket Manager

John Mark Rafacz
Editorial Manager

Mark Tinik
Production Supervisor

Jason Winfield
Production Supervisor
Community Advisory Council

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vice chair
Melinda Stearns

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Barry Bram
Stephanie Corcino
Sandy Elbin
Ed Galus
Charlene Gaus
Tom Hogan
Rich Kalin
Charles “Chick” King
Eileen Leibowitz, emeritus
Elinor “Ellie” Lewis
Larry Mroz
Sally Schaadt
Sue Thorpe
Lillian Upcraft

student representatives
Zachary McKay
Marissa Works

Workforce

26 full-time employees
27 part-time employees
98 student employees
114 volunteers
8 interns

Volunteer Event Staff Advisory Board

Ruth Bell
Jean Bloom
Roger Cartright
Dave Cowher
Vicky Droll
Emily Gregory
Susan Houser
Grace Long
Kathy Matason
Barbara Reed
Members

We appreciate the support of Center for the Performing Arts members during 2018–2019.

Executive Circle
$5000 and more

Bob and Sonia Hufnagel
Mrs. Barbara Palmer
Betty Scott and Chick King

Leadership Circle
$3,000 to $4,999

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Janet Fowler Dargitz
and Karl George Stoedefalke
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Blake and Linda Gall
Helen A. Harvey
Beverly Hickey
Dorsey and Sherry Houtz
Rich and Sally Kalin
Eileen W. Leibowitz
Dan and Peggy Hall LeKander
Mary Ellen and Tom Litzinger
Pieter W. and Lida Ouwehand
Lynn Sidehamer Brown

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$2,000 to $2,999

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Suzann Tedesco
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Susan Zimmerman
Jazz Train
$400 and more

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Louis P. Silverman and Veronica A. Samborsky
Dan and Melinda Stearns
Dan and Linda Trevino
Barbara and Joel A. Weiss
Charlotte Zmyslo

Monterey Jazz Festival
On Tour’s Bria Skonberg
Photo by Carolina Palmgren
Lam and Lina Hood grew up during the Great Depression in families who subsisted on the basics, but they found ways to enjoy various events and give back to their communities. The couple’s volunteerism and unwavering support for the Center for the Performing Arts—as ushers for more than twenty years and members since the mid-2000s—earned the Hoods the center’s 2019 Distinguished Service Award.

“They are shining examples of engaged volunteers and donors,” says center Director George Trudeau. “They have reached out to engage many others in our community to join them in supporting the Center for the Performing Arts. This is a very well-deserved recognition of their outstanding service.”

The couple were close to retirement—Lam as dean of Penn State’s College of Agriculture and Lina at Conferences and Institutes at Penn State Outreach—when she says she realized they were missing “lots of good things here at the University.” They joined the center as volunteer ushers as a way to stay abreast of the center’s events.

In 2006, Lina joined the center’s Volunteer Event Staff Advisory Board, and the couple also became event sponsors. From 2011 to 2018, Lam was a member of the center’s Community Advisory Council, the final two years as council chairman.

“I think the important thing for us has always been to sponsor,” Lam says. “We’ve supported the center in a whole lot of different ways. I think when I was on the council, it felt like we needed to step up and do more than we’d been doing: … The whole idea was to try to encourage others to step up.”

One way he aimed to rally support for the center was to co-sponsor an event with others. He says he understands that for some sponsors the price tag might be hefty, “so sponsoring with a small group of people or another couple is one way to give back without breaking the bank.”

The couple’s contributions to and involvement in the community didn’t stop with the Center for the Performing Arts. The Hoods contributed to the College of Agricultural Sciences and created a Penn State scholarship for adult learners.

He worked with Habitat for Humanity and shared his passion about the issue of affordable workforce housing in Centre County. Lina helps out with Centre Volunteers in Medicine. Both are members of The Arboretum at Penn State’s Founders Circle and ardent supporters of Mount Nittany Health. They also participate in social circles in their housing development, enjoy a variety of Penn State sports, and support volleyball boosters.

They say that helping others helps to make the community better for everyone. The spirit of the award—which recognizes dedication, contributions, and service to the center—pairs neatly with the Hoods’ longstanding ideology.

“We’ve always had the philosophy of giving back to the community in a variety of ways, not just financially, because the community provides so much for us,” Lam says.

The Distinguished Service Award has been given annually since 1996.
Thanks for the Support

We are grateful to these businesses, organizations, and individuals for supporting the Center for the Performing Arts 2018–2019 season.

Sybarite5’s Sarah Whitney
Photo by Alex Fedorov
Sponsors

Sapphire $10,000–$19,999 • Ruby $5,000–$9,999
Platinum $4,000–$4,999 • Gold $3,000–$3,999
Silver $2,000–$2,999 • Bronze $1,000–$1,999

Sapphire
Northwest
TIAA
The Village at Penn State

Ruby
Patricia Best and Thomas Ray
Lynn Sidehamer Brown
Designer's Studio
Gay and James Dunne
Don and Mary Ellen Fisher
Foxdale Village, A Quaker-Directed Continuing Care Retirement Community
Geisinger
Rich and Sally Kalin
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PSECU
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Tire Town

Gold
Anonymous
Mimi Barash Coppersmith
Chick King and Betty Scott
Eileen Leibowitz
The Passionate Supporters of Dance
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Shirley J. Coploff
Steve and Sandy Elbin
Nancy Gamble
Lam and Lina Hood
Dr. Marla L. Moon at Nittany Eye Associates
Jeane and Richard Singer

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Helen A. Harvey
Joel Confer BMW
Mercedes-Benz Audi Volvo Volkswagen Nissan and Sprinter of State College

Accessibility Outreach Program

The Center for the Performing Arts is committed to making the arts accessible to everyone and offers many services to patrons who need assistance in order to fully enjoy attending live performances.

Thank you to the 2018–2019 program sponsor:
Dr. Marla L. Moon at Nittany Eye Associates

We thank the following individuals and organizations for their ongoing support of our audio description and ticketing programs:

Nanette Anslinger
Rana McMurray Arnold
Hearing Loss Association of America, Central Pennsylvania Chapter
Penn State Affirmative Action Office, Office of the President
Penn State Facilities Resource Management, Office of Physical Plant
Sight-Loss Support Group of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.
Community Partners

ACRES Project
America Reads
Annie Halenbake Ross Library
Borough of State College
Centre Crest
Essence 2 Ltd.
For Good Performance Troupe
Higher Achievement
Jana Marie Foundation
LION Bash
New Leaf Initiative
Roots of Life
Schlow Centre Region Library
Skills of Central PA
State College Area High School
State College Area School District Delta Program
Taproot Kitchen
Temple University College of Public Health’s Occupational Therapy Program
3 Dots Downtown
Tyrone-Snyder Public Library

Penn State Partners

Alliance of Heroic Hearts
Alumni Association
Asian Classical Music Club
Ballroom Dance Club
Blue & White Society
Center for Arts & Crafts
Center for Ethical and Spiritual Development
Center for Science and the Schools
Chinese Language Program
Chinese Students and Scholars Association
Coffee Club
College of Health and Human Development
College of the Liberal Arts
Communication Sciences and Disorders Program
Dance Program
Department of English
Department of French and Francophone Studies
Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese
Frost Entomological Museum
Health Promotion and Wellness
LifeLink PSU
Matson Museum of Anthropology
Music Service Club
Palmer Museum of Art
Paterno Fellows Program
Performing Arts Council
School of Labor and Employment Relations
School of Music
School of Theatre
Schreyer Honors College
Student Engagement Network
Sustainable Communities Collaborative
Tennis Club
Woskob Family Gallery

Hospitality Partners

The Atherton Hotel
Comfort Suites
Country Inn & Suites
Courtyard by Marriott
Daniel Vaughn Designs
Federal Taphouse
Gardners Candles
Happy Valley Hotels: Fairfield Inn & Suites, Hampton Inn & Suites, Holiday Inn Express, and SpringHill Suites
Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences
Hyatt Place State College
Lion Country Lodging: Carnegie Inn & Spa, Days Inn Penn State, Hilton Garden Inn, Nittany Budget Motel, Quality Inn, and Super 8
The Nittany Lion Inn
Paul’s Provisions
Penn State Transportation Services
Residence Inn by Marriott
Sleep Inn

Grants

Arts Midwest Touring Fund
Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau
Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation
National Endowment for the Arts
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
University Park Student Fee Board

Cirque Éloize’s Una Bennett, Sabina Halde, and Tuedon Ariri

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Endowments

Endowment Benefactors
($100,000 and more)

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McQuaide Blasko Endowment
Penn State International Dance Ensemble Endowment
Pieter and Lida Ouwehand Endowment

Endowments

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PIETER AND LIDA OUWEHAND ENDOWMENT
Pieter W. and Lida Ouwehand

PENN STATE INTERNATIONAL DANCE ENSEMBLE ENDOWMENT
John H. Booske
Drs. Niti Goel and Dennis Walling
Elizabeth Hanley and Patrick Kolivoski
Music Accord Commissions

The Center for the Performing Arts is proud to be a member of the prestigious national chamber music commissioning consortium Music Accord. With combined resources from member organizations, Music Accord each year commissions several works pairing great American composers with outstanding American chamber ensembles.

The center brought two of these commissions to Penn State, inviting the composers to be in residence for the world premieres. In September 2018, composer Libby Larsen came to University Park for the premiere of You, which she wrote for the renowned a cappella octet Cantus, which made its second appearance at Penn State. In October 2018, Escher String Quartet was joined by pianist Gilles Vonsattel for a performance of All Roads by composer Anthony Cheung.

For each engagement, the artists and composer combined to offer a Classical Coffeehouse program the night before their public performance.
Soweto Gospel Choir

Many languages, many voices, one message: peace, love, and unity. Soweto Gospel Choir returned to Penn State in November 2018 with a program featuring some of Nelson Mandela’s favorite songs, along with Christmas favorites sung in a variety of languages. While the choir’s time at Penn State was short, the impact it made on the community was big.

The Center for the Performing Arts collaborated with the choir; Essence 2, Essence of Joy’s community gospel choir counterpart; and Roots of Life, a West African-influenced performance company comprised of middle- and high school-aged students from State College Area School District. The groups participated in a cultural exchange at which each ensemble performed for the others. After a long ride from New England, the Soweto ensemble arrived just in time for the exchange. The travelers’ fatigue quickly melted away with the infectious joy of sharing and warmth that filled the room. In all, 200 people participated, proving once again that music is the universal language.

The center also partnered with State College Area School District’s Delta Program, whose students created candles on which they wrote what they would each personally do to uphold and promote the legacies of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mandela. Those candles were displayed in the Eisenhower Auditorium lobby during the Soweto performance. Earlier that day, more than 400 schoolchildren and educators from around the region participated in a School-Time Matinee performance by the choir.
Fleck/Hussain/Meyer

Three masterful genre benders and the leading virtuosos on their respective instruments, Béla Fleck (banjo), Zakir Hussain (tabla), and Edgar Meyer (double bass) combined in a captivating performance in November 2018. They were joined by special guest Rakesh Chaurasia, a noted Indian flutist, who amazed the audience with his artistry.

The Center for the Performing Arts partnered with THON so that $5 of each ticket purchased would be donated to the student-run philanthropy. A student THON representative joined Center for the Performing Arts Director George Trudeau on-stage prior to the performance, after which a short video about THON was unveiled. The center provided $5,960 to THON as a result of the partnership.

Cirque Éloize

Cirque Éloize, the acclaimed Canadian contemporary circus company, made its sixth Penn State appearance in October 2018. The company performed HOTEL, its newest creation. The Center for the Performing Arts provided support for the creation of the show thanks to the support of fifty community “investors.”

Created to celebrate the company’s twenty-fifth anniversary, HOTEL takes audiences into a timeless art-deco hotel to meet a daring, engaging, and funny cast of characters who deploy a host of amazing circus skills. Live music and singing throughout enhance the experience. The show has gone on to performances in North America, Europe, and South America.
Sounds of China

Sounds of China, a delightful eight-member ensemble, arrived in the United States in February 2019 for a three-week tour, including two days in State College engaging with students and celebrating Chinese New Year.

Penn State’s Chinese Students and Scholars Association hosted a welcome dinner for Sounds of China. It was a celebration of Lunar New Year and an opportunity for the musicians to feel welcomed by people who spoke the same language. At the dinner, a member of the Chinese Traditional Instrument Club played a tune of welcome on an erhu, a traditional Chinese stringed instrument.

The next day, the musicians visited a State College Area High School Chinese language class at which they demonstrated their traditional instruments to high school students learning to speak Mandarin. Ensemble members were impressed with the high school students’ language skills.

More than eighty Penn State students, also learning Mandarin, were treated to a two-hour demonstration and history lesson about the instruments and the sounds they make. “After all, embracing and learning about diverse musical traditions is part of cultural exploration,” says Chunyuan Di, the faculty member who organized the language class visit, “and it is crucial for students to discover more through in-depth, face-to-face experience with professional Chinese musicians.”

Sounds of China’s Schwab Auditorium concert showcased the ensemble’s unique sound, which is contemporary despite being played on traditional instruments. The music was enthusiastically received by the audience, including students who stayed long after the concert’s end to meet the musicians.
Urban Bush Women

Brooklyn-based dance theatre company Urban Bush Women has been making groundbreaking, challenging, and fierce works of dance for forty years. Hosting the company for almost a week in March 2019 allowed for deep and meaningful engagement in the community. At Penn State to perform Hair and Other Stories, the engagement was reflective of the themes of the work: exploring our relationship with our hair, and finding and giving voice to our individual and collective power from a woman-centered perspective.

The company engaged with women of all ages for a “Hair Party”—an exploration of hair and our relationship to notions of beauty. Who gets to define it? How do we internalize those prevailing notions? How do we express our own beauty in the world? The session ended with guided movement reflective of the themes explored throughout the evening. The party was at Woskob Gallery in Penn State Downtown Theatre Center, which was featuring an exhibition titled Race and Revolution, a fitting visual accompaniment to the physical work of the session.

Also included in the engagement were a community dance party and a community sing, both in State College Municipal Building. Each session featured the participants singing and moving, with plenty of room for personal expression within the guided sessions.

The engagement concluded with the performance of Hair and Other Stories, which featured lots of audience interaction and made powerful observations about life through an African-American woman-centered lens.

The performance was preceded by Artistic Viewpoints, at which Associate Artistic Director Chanon Judson asked audience members to think about their own relationships to their hair through a series of guided questions that got them discussing the topic with one another. After the performance, company members engaged the audience in thought-provoking questions.
The Center for the Performing Arts, partnering with Skills of Central PA, Inc., remembered the struggle of some Centre County residents with a three-month “Warm Hearts” clothing drive that ended in January 2019. The drive collected more than 150 new winter-weather items—including hats, scarves, gloves, and socks—to benefit community members in need.

The drive, which ran from November 1 through January 26, was inspired by the center’s presentation of Los Angeles-based contemporary dance company BODYTRAFFIC at Eisenhower Auditorium on the drive’s final day. The presentation featured Fragile Dwellings, a work dedicated to the Los Angeles homeless population.

With increasing numbers of individuals in the State College area in need, and with the closing of downtown State College’s Hearts for Homeless shelter in the summer of 2018, Fragile Dwellings could be representative of any community.

“This successful drive demonstrates how the arts can catalyze awareness and offer a meaningful way to contribute to the good work being done in our community for those experiencing housing insecurity,” says Medora Ebersole, the center’s education and community programs manager.

Karry Carr, program specialist at Skills of Central PA Inc., distributed the donated winter accessories to Out of the Cold: Centre County, Housing Transitions (Centre House), Centre Safe, and Burrowes Street Youth Haven.

‘Warm Hearts’ drive nets 150 articles of winter clothing
The Center for the Performing Arts and Penn State Student Affairs, in collaboration with partners across the University Park campus, have launched IllumiNATION, a student-focused, arts-driven festival.

IllumiNATION includes a series of workshops for Penn State students to make illuminated lanterns, hats, wings, and flying “creatures.” The workshops will culminate in a parade and a dance party on March 28, 2020. That date coincides with Earth Hour, an annual global lights-out event organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature. Earth Hour aims to raise awareness of the effects excessive energy consumption have on the environment.

Pittsburgh-based puppet and parade artist Cheryl Capezzuti, a Penn State alumna, will help accomplish the festival’s goals. She has been leading workshops for students, plus train-the-trainer workshops for service units at University Park, with the idea that those units will lead their own lantern-making workshops for the students they serve. In addition, Capezzuti has created large-scale puppets—a group of lions that stand ten feet tall—to lead the 2020 parade.

IllumiNATION seeks to:

- Unite Penn Staters as a community through the arts by providing a catalyst for connecting students throughout their time at the University;
- Bridge the gap between international and American students with a series of workshops led by students who will share with their peers how light is celebrated in various religions and cultures;
- Spark conversation and demonstrate best practices regarding sustainability and climate change.

Learn more about IllumiNATION.