

THE ARTS

You may be familiar with the phrase, “*Will it play in Peoria?*” This famous question originated during Peoria’s exciting vaudeville days in the 1920s. After a new live act or stage show was produced, it was soon booked into a Peoria theater to test audience reaction to the show. If the show did not receive a strong positive approval, one of two things could happen: the production was rewritten, recast, or otherwise improved, or it was canceled. Peoria has a history of being a tough crowd for the arts, and thank goodness because that means we’ve developed an arts community here that most cities can only dream of.

The Peoria Symphony Orchestra (PSO), founded in 1897, is the 14th oldest symphony orchestra in the United States. The PSO’s repertoire includes a seven-concert classical subscription series, pops concerts and student performances. Season subscription ticket holders and guests enjoy performances by internationally renowned soloists and local artists, popular works and 20th century compositions as well as familiar and unique solo instruments. Through the years, Peoria Symphony audiences have also enjoyed top-quality soloists including Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Andre Watts, Joshua Bell, Emanuel Ax, Bobby McFerrin, Hilary Hahn and more. The Peoria Symphony Orchestra recently welcomed new Music Director, George Edward Stelluto. Mr. Stelluto, currently undergoing his premier season with the PSO, is also the Resident Conductor at the Juilliard School, the Assistant Conductor of the Ravinia Festival with the Chicago Symphony, and an advisor to *Sinfonia por La Vida* in Ecuador.

The Peoria Ballet has been an important institution within the Peoria area arts community since its founding in 1965. The academy offers 60 different classes in ballet, pointe, tap, jazz, hip hop, ballroom, acting for children, Pilates and more to students of all ages and levels. Additionally, Academy Director Rebekah von Rathonyi has implemented a pre-professional program for the serious student who will one day strive for a career in dance. The Peoria Ballet Academy attracts some students who travel up to two hours each day, five days a week to avail themselves of the excellent training the academy provides. The Peoria Ballet season includes two mainstage performances, most notably the holiday season’s annual *Nutcracker*, and various community and guest performances.

The Contemporary Art Center is Peoria’s cultural hub featuring art exhibitions, artist studios, art instruction, comedy improv, poetry nights, and jazz and blues performances. The Contemporary Art Center exhibits the work of living artists at the forefront of their fields. About 20 resident artists are constantly creating art on-site. Additionally, prolific artist and co-founder Preston Jackson continues to maintain his sculpture and painting studio right here at the Contemporary Art Center on the beautiful Peoria Riverfront.

As far as live theatre, Peoria is the place to be. With four major theatres, you will always be able to catch a show suited just to your liking. **Peoria Players** theatre has been in continuous operation since 1919, making it the oldest continuously running community theatre in Illinois, and the fourth oldest in the nation. Players has an annual season featuring six shows that are full of variety, from comedies and dramas to classic musicals. **Cornstock Theatre** offers the chance to see great shows in a unique environment. The summer season is 5 family friendly shows in a tent in Upper **Bradley Park**; and the indoor theatre showing during the colder months offers the chance to see some of the most edgy and groundbreaking theatre the area has to offer. **Eastlight Theatre** is a semi-professional theatre seating over 1,000 patrons. Eastlight features the best of the Midwest and Chicago professional entertainers. For a more all-inclusive theatre experience, try **Conklin’s Barn II Dinner Theatre**. Conklin’s combines a wonderful buffet with hilarious professional comedies and musicals year round in a rustic barn built in 1941.

The arts are an integral part of the Peoria Area community, a part of our history and our social fabric. We’re proud to offer our visitors the chance to experience what “**Plays in Peoria.**”

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