



Huge Free Lower East Side Festival of the Arts

Hundreds of performers converge on Theater for the New City May 24-26

THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY - For three days in May, LES is going to be more.

Theater for the New City is presenting its annual Lower East Side Festival of the Arts, a massive annual performance marathon in and around the theater, May 24-26.

The three-day, free downtown arts festival includes hundreds of well-known and emerging artists ranging from theater to dance, music to movies, a street fair and art exhibit and even a kids' program.

This celebration of the arts collectively provides a showcase of downtown's artistic diversity and energy this year being dubbed "20/20 Vision: Save our Planet, Save Our Country."

"I think it speaks for itself," Crystal Field, Theater for the New City's Executive Artistic Director," said regarding the theme. "Go and vote the way you believe and push for issues that you think are important right now."

The event has become a showcase for many of Downtown's better and best known artists, as well as a launching pad for emerging artists – and a place where it's possible to see a wide range of work.

Performance artists Phoebe Legere and Reno, cabaret singer K.T. Sullivan and playwright Eduardo Machado are among those slated to present work his year.

Legislators such as New York City Council Member Carlina Rivera and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer are expected to attend.

Assembly Member Glick in a citation honoring the theater for its festival in the past cited it as a "celebration of our community's entertainers and artists" that provides "an opportunity for community members to experience and engage in arts of all kinds."

The theme of 20/20 vision and art as something to save our selves and society comes at a time when the arts themselves face continued challenges in funding and truth in art is also under fire.

Field said it's important to present "shows that have something to say," whether it's personal statements or regarding issues.

The festival has become a part of New York City's cultural life, as well as a platform for artists and an opportunity for audiences to view a vibrant downtown scene.

The East Village and the Lower East Side today are thriving, filled with restaurants, retailers and entertainment, but the festival started when the arts faced a very different attack.

TNC Executive Director Crystal Field and Esther Garcia Cartagena, executive director of Loisida Inc., conceived of the festival as a way to shine a positive light on the East Village (LES) when the area faced big drug and crime problems.

"We wanted to tell the world that it was also a haven for art and artists," Field said. "It was the great birthplace of new art."

While many things have changed in the LES art scene, TNC remains part of it with four theaters that at any given moment present new work.

The festival's logo remains the same colorful mosaic that it was during its first year, a tribute to the region itself as a mosaic of cultural backgrounds and ethnicities.

"This was originally done by a Lower East Side artist, Christopher Tanner," Field said of the image that signifies the festival.

As part of the festival, on Saturday, May 25, TNC will close down Tenth Street between First and Second Aves. for a street festival filled with vendors, performances and a puppet parade. There is also a kids' program inside, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and film from noon to midnight. On Sunday, there is a huge poetry slam from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. On all three evenings two theaters buzz with theater, music and dance from 6 p.m. to midnight.

"It's going to be a hell of a weekend," Crystal Field said of the event, which is free to the public. "Make a reservation early, so you get in when you arrive."

A schedule of performances will be posted by mid-May on the Theater for the New City website www.theaterforthenewcity.net

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