

'Beach Blanket' wasn't the only game in town: where to take guests now

Lily Janiak



Dottie Lux performs at the Stud. Photo: Gabrielle Lurie / Special to The Chronicle 2016

Among the many reasons to mourn the loss of “Beach Blanket Babylon” is that the musical revue, with its spectacular costumes and superbly talented cast, was an excellent entertainment option for your out-of-town guests. It channeled an old-school, only-in-San-Francisco spirit, but without getting too freaky. It paraded feathers; it didn't ruffle them.

But just because “Beach Blanket” gave its final performance on New Year's Eve doesn't mean that you and your Aunt Cheryl have nothing to do next time she visits. Think of the closure instead as a spur to support the abundance of local arts and entertainment offerings that are still out there, whether they're already flourishing or just getting started. Remember, even “Beach Blanket” was once a cobbled-together outfit with no plans to last beyond six weeks. San Francisco can't support new institutions, or even give birth to new artistic creations, without you to witness them.

With that, here are our top suggestions, broken down by the particular itch you and your guest might want to scratch.

Theater that no one else could do

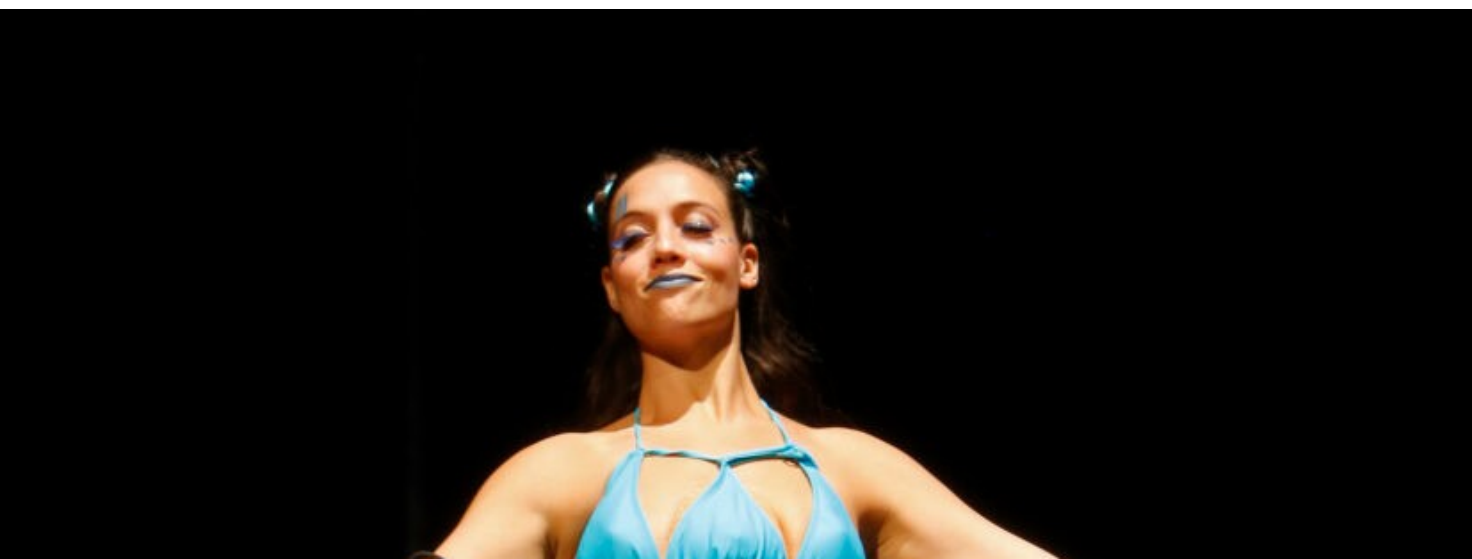
For the visitor who: is already a theater fan but wants to see something she can't get in her hometown.



The ensemble of California Shakespeare Theater's "The Good Person of Szechwan." Photo: Kevin Berne / California Shakespeare Theater

California Shakespeare Theater: In the past I've called Cal Shakes the [best date night](#) in Bay Area theater, but the company's splendors will wow your guest no matter how amorous your intentions are. Arriving 90 minutes early and bringing a picnic are essential. It's like a magical fairyland up there in Orinda, the setting sun limning the hillsides in gold, as cattle low or frogs ribbit or owls hoot in the distance. Finish your picnic inside the amphitheater as the play starts, snuggling in the [sleeping bag you remembered to bring](#), because you're smart, as a reimagined classic or bold new work unfolds before you at dusk, just in time for the stage lights to catch your eye. The 2020 season begins in May, with "The Comedy of Errors."

"The Comedy of Errors": May 27-June 14. \$35-\$95. California Shakespeare Theater, 100 California Shakespeare Theater Way, Orinda. 510-548-9666. www.calshakes.org



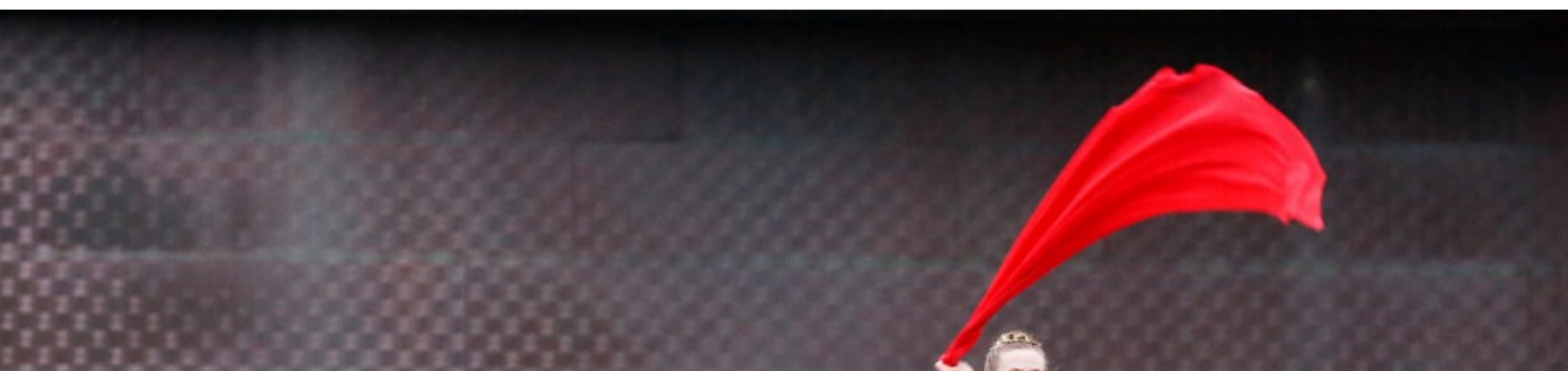


Jay Bee dances during “Tourettes Without Regrets.” Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle 2017

Tourettes Without Regrets: Mix poetry, circus, stand-up comedy, burlesque and hip-hop, and you might begin to have an idea what it’s like at the monthly variety show hosted by Jamie DeWolf at the Oakland Metro Operahouse. A performer might play baseball with raw meat, or wear pasties that spin by remote control operation, or go head-to-head in a battle of dirty haiku or passive-aggressive compliments. It’s vaudeville made contemporary and grungy and punk. It erases distinctions between high and low, saying a slam poet and an aerialist are both rock stars. It dares you to be offended and to keep watching anyway, and then maybe go offend someone else by being brave enough to perform yourself.

F— Valentine’s Day Spectacular: 8:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 6. \$15. Oakland Metro Operahouse, 522 Second St., Oakland.

<http://touretteswithoutregrets.com>





Lauren Hayes, as Calpurnia, performs in We Players' adaption of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, "Caesar Maximus," at the Music Concourse in Golden Gate Park. Photo: Amy Osborne / Special to The Chronicle 2018

We Players: The 19-year-old troupe founded by Ava Roy stages classic and new plays in local, regional and national Bay Area parks, and their works make treasured places feel less like untouchable, sacred altars and more like canvases or springboards. They've splashed color on Angel Island, filled the windows on Alcatraz with ghosts, sliced through the San Francisco Bay on a schooner and heaved voluminous skirts across Petaluma Adobe. Rarely are you still for long at a We Players show; the company makes you hike for your art, and they vie with the elements — breakers splashing, gusts howling — for your attention, even as they conscript nature into the show. Catch them next with "What Alice Found There," a new adaptation of Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-Glass," staged in Golden Gate Park, from the Rose Garden to the windmill.

"What Alice Found There": April 10-May 17. \$30-\$70. Rose Garden, Golden Gate Park, John F. Kennedy Drive, S.F. 415-547-0189. www.weplayers.org





From left: Phil Wong, Ryan Williams French, Gendell Hernández and Norman Gee in Word for Word's "Lucia Berlin: Stories."

Photo: Julie Schuchard / Word for Word

Word for Word: The mission doesn't sound good when you describe it: adapt works of literature to the stage without changing a single word. But Word for Word isn't reader's theater. There's no narrator, no open book to be read aloud. Instead, the 27-year-old theater company finds inventive ways to shed the page and make text theatrical. Maybe an inanimate object gets played by an actor. Maybe the character who says a line in the text isn't the person who speaks it onstage. Maybe it becomes a nag, a taunt, a come-on. Up next, the company adapts stories from "Retablos," Octavio Solis' collection of memories and dreams and visions from his childhood in El Paso, Texas.

"Retablos: Stories From a Life Lived Along the Border": Feb. 22-March 15. \$20-\$50. Z Below, 470 Florida St., S.F. 415-626-0453. www.zspace.org

Gender flouting and flaunting

For the visitor who: has already converted and should just move here already — or the one subconsciously pining for a shocking travel anecdote with which to regale her next book club.



Vivvyanne ForeverMORE addresses the crowd while hosting Drag Alive at the Stud. Photo: Josie Norris / The Chronicle 2019

Drag Alive: Your first feeling at the Stud, the worker-owned queer bar in SoMa, might be that you're right at home. The bouncer, Kia, might have a canine assistant, Rico, to whom you can feed dog treats. On Friday evenings, when you cross to the side of the bar where Drag Alive is staged, you'll get handed a crayon and a bingo card, whose squares read, "Nip Slip," "Bearded Queen" and "Technical Difficulties," among other fun categories. (Cross out five in a row, and you can get a free drink.) On a stage that's barely wider than a drag queen is tall, and that's barely deep enough to take a full high-heeled step, Drag Alive performers show what teasing, disrobing and especially lip-syncing are all about. Just because you're not vocalizing doesn't mean your jowls aren't undulating, or that imagined singing can't rack your body to the point of convulsion and collapse. Pony up for a front-row table, and you'll sit in the shadow of those fanning eyelashes, those arches of extra-dark lip liner, catching gusts of air as skirts swish and wigs whirl.

7 p.m. Fridays. \$15-\$30. The Stud, 399 Ninth St., S.F. www.studsf.com



Performer Lady Jack on stage during "Monday Night Hubba, at the DNA Lounge. Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez / The Chronicle 2016

Hubba Hubba Revue: Every Monday night at the DNA Lounge, above the aroma of pizza under heat lamps on the first floor, producer Jim Sweeney puts on what he calls "a little weekly clubhouse" of burlesque, and the description is apt. As master of ceremonies, he calls out to his regular patrons by name. At a recent performance, one audience member handed out (drug-free) M&M cookies from a Tupperware container. A "stripping granny" might bop to a dirty old ditty as she dares to lift the fringe of her skirt. A clumsy-on-purpose magician might just happen to spill out of her tuxedo. Performers are ferocious and frolicsome, playful and pouty, faux-innocent and for-real inventive, with costumes that conjure a slumber party or Hollywood Golden Age glamour. At Hubba Hubba, sexiness knows only the bounds of the human imagination.

Monday Night Hubba: 9 p.m. Mondays. \$10-\$15. **TempAsian:** 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 14. \$20-\$30. DNA Lounge, 375 11th St., S.F. 415-626-4337. www.dnalounge.com



Kristina Cardenas (right) cheers during a performance by Sgt. Die Wies (left) at Jolene's. Photo: Gabrielle Lurie / The Chronicle 2019

Jolene's: Pasties, pastries and sausage patties might seem an unlikely combination, but brunch buffet and show at [Jolene's Bar and Restaurant](http://www.jolenessf.com) makes a persuasive case that your boozy Sunday morning calorie infusion only improves when it's accompanied by performers in various states of undress. One of the first things you see upon entering the Mission District space is a neon sign that reads "You Are Safe Here," reflecting the commitment by co-owners Jolene Linsangan and Shannon Amitin to welcome all genders and sexualities. Performers reflect that same ethos, representing a range of body types, toying with and defying old-school gender divides, revealing them as irrelevant. One crew member might prance by, wearing only frilly briefs and a headband with an iridescent unicorn horn, to do double duty, first operating the spotlight, then raking in wadded-up dollar bills. Maybe Sgt. Die Wies will wrap a stuffed snake around you, transforming its head into a microphone, all while you're polishing off your fried potatoes, which glisten in crispiness on the outside, revealing a center as creamy as whipped butter.

Brunch buffet and show: 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Sundays. Jolene's, 2700 16th St., S.F. 415-913-7948. www.jolenessf.com





D'Arcy Drollinger (left) with fellow cast members in "Sex and the City Live!" at Oasis. Photo: Santiago Mejia / The Chronicle 2019

Oasis: Heklina, D'Arcy Drollinger and the team at the 5-year-old SoMa nightclub Oasis understand your thirst for nostalgia. They also know how drag can reveal new angles and depths in our favorite cultural commodities. Their take on "Sex and the City" made me think a TV series isn't complete when its final episode airs, but when drag performers subvert it, parody it, amplify it, teasing out what-ifs. This month, Emily McGowan, Caleb Haven Draper, Sue Casa, Paul Grant Hovannes, Carol Anne Walker, Veronica Dolginko, Emily Dwyer, Intensive Claire and Cassie Grilley star in "Friends Live!" — reanimating the quirky 1990s sextet who trade snarky banter between two preposterously large Manhattan apartments. This week also marks the final (for now) performance of Heklina's weekly drag show, "Mother," before Heklina takes a break from co-running the club.

"Friends Live!": 7 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 6-8. Through March 14. \$27.50-\$50.

"The Final Mother": 10 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 8. \$20.

Oasis, 298 11th St., S.F. <https://sfoasis.com>

Keeping it old school

For the visitor who: has an old soul, a hankering for the glamour of yesteryear, a propensity to imagine himself or herself as Sam Spade.





Paula West performs at Feinstein's at the Nikko. Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle 2017

Feinstein's at the Nikko: Live the fantasy version of yourself, the one who prefers the hushed intimacy of a nightclub to an alienating stadium or an exhausting festival. Feinstein's at the Nikko will make you feel like you're in the Golden Age of Hollywood, like a movie star could casually walk in at any moment. In February, the great Paula West is in residence for two weekends. She treats notes with a sort of kindness and compassion, like she knows exactly what it feels like to be an F sharp, yet she sashays in and out of them like it's all a snap, no big deal. Her choices in dynamics fizz and crackle; she might deploy a whisper or a crescendo almost in play. But if she destabilizes, it's only to drive home a new emotional point. When, in "Like a Rolling Stone," she asks in the refrain, "How does it feel?" it sounds like she's actually asking, and like she's envisioning a specific listener.

Paula West: 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 6-8; 5 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 9. Through Feb. 16. \$65-\$80, plus \$20 food and beverage minimum per person. Hotel Nikko, 222 Mason St., S.F. 866-663-1063. www.feinsteinsf.com



Jay Alexander springs his deck of cards for a portrait at the Exit Theatre. Photo: Santiago Mejia / The Chronicle 2017

Marrakech Magic Theater: You won't believe that this tiny jewel box of a theater exists, let alone that someone could construct such a venue in the basement of a Middle Eastern restaurant in the Tenderloin. Walking down the stairs of the [Marrakech Magic Theater](#) has the feel of descending a secret passage. Order a sugary drink and some appetizers — the vegetarian bastila combines sweet and savory in a way that your taste buds might not be able to compute, but in a good way — and soon magician Jay Alexander will visit each table, one by one, for close-up magic (card tricks are a specialty), followed by a stage show featuring feats of mind reading.

6:30 and 9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Feb. 6-8; 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 9. Ongoing. \$55-\$65. Marrakech Magic Theater, 419 O'Farrell St., S.F. 415-794-6893. www.sanfranciscomagictheater.com



Katrina McGraw doing her cabaret act at Martuni's. Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez / The Chronicle 2018

Martuni's: The piano bar on Market and Valencia is really a public service. Where else in the city, in the world, can you walk in any day of the week, sheet music in hand, or just with mischief in your heart, and find a kind, accommodating, welcoming pianist to accompany you? On some nights the [Martuni's](#) crowd seems like they were built into the piano itself; on others, it's a bit like a secret clubhouse for your high school's musical theater crowd. No one even winces if you can't crank out that high note. First timer? Your accompanist might rally the other patrons to clap along in support.

4 p.m.-2 a.m. daily. Martuni's, 4 Valencia St., S.F. 415-241-0205.





Christian Cagigal leads the San Francisco Ghost Hunt Walking Tour in Pacific Heights. Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle 2018

San Francisco Ghost Hunt: No visit to San Francisco would be complete without a gander at some of our spectacular examples of Victorian residential architecture, and part of the fun is imagining the dwellers of yore who walked the same hallways — and maybe still haunt them. Christian Cagigal, with his paranormal-themed [walking tour](#) of Pacific Heights, dives into the spicy lore behind some of your favorite columned porticoes and bracketed cornices. There are casks of rum that hold much more than rum; there's a “voodoo queen” who was actually an African American female millionaire. There are contemporary inhabitants who report mysteriously getting covered by blankets in the middle of the night; there's a mansion that, according to Cagigal, kind of looks like a skull. Cagigal is also one of the Bay Area's most delightful and thoughtful magicians, and he incorporates some of his sleight of hand into the tour, accompanying his superb storytelling.

8 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, Feb. 12-16. Ongoing. \$20. Tours begin outside Healing Arts Center, 1801 Bush St., S.F.

www.sfghosthunt.com

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