

The Arts

Festivities light up holidays

Events blend new, traditional activities

Old chestnuts — and new upstarts — will mean nary a dull moment in San Diego this holiday season.

Locals can once again put the annual activities on their calendars: the San Diego Repertory Theatre's production of "A Christmas Carol," Balboa Park's Christmas on the Prado and California Ballet's staging of "The Nutcracker," among others.

Newcomers on the red and green scene include Coronado's "White Christmas" celebration, the Christmas classic run for the homeless and the Boring Theatre's presentation of "Blues Christmas."

The assortment is huge, and it includes lots of things for the kids and plenty of freebies for those on a tight budget.

Details on old favorites and new activities follow.

Theater



Kerry Cederberg Meads of Lamb's Players Theatre has come through again with an original holiday show for San Diegans. Meads has borrowed some characters from Scottish author George MacDonald for

comic-musical presentation for families. The play will run through Dec. 23 with showtimes at 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays (and Monday, Dec. 18); 10 a.m., 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays; and 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. (Matinees will also be presented at 2 p.m. Dec. 19-22.) The theater is at 500 Plaza Blvd. in National City. Tickets \$15 and \$18; 474-4542.

The newly established Del Mar Theatre Ensemble will jump on the mistletoe bandwagon with a mixed holiday theater program, which will include "Peter and the Wolf," "A Child's Christmas in Wales," "The Night Before Christmas" and other stories staged for children and their families. The show will run through Dec. 20 at 7 p.m. Saturdays and noon and 4 p.m. Sundays in the Del Mar Plaza, 1555 Camino Del Mar. Tickets \$5 and \$7.50; 259-6127.

In its 14th edition of the Dickens classic, the San Diego Repertory Theatre will bring "A Christmas Carol" closer to home. A vacant lot in downtown San Diego is the setting for the homeless characters who, while keeping warm around a fire, act out the story of Scrooge's evolution from miser to samaritan. Showtimes for the play, which runs Thursday through Dec. 24, are 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays and 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays in Horton Plaza's Lyceum Stage, downtown. Tickets \$15-\$23; 235-8025.

Langston Hughes' holiday gospel play "Black Nativity" will be presented by the Southeast Community Theatre, in cooperation with the Contemporary Black



While other contemporary art galleries have closed, Sushi is thriving in its 10th season

The performing space's success is a direct result of the efforts of...

Lynne Schuette, who will produce 65 perfor...

The San Diego Union

SUSHI'S DIRECTOR MAKES IT TO



Lynne Schuette's vision gives alternative artists a voice

Sushi began its 10th season this fall, a happy birthday for an organization grown from near invisibility to one of the city's most respected — and irreplaceable — arts institutions.

Essentially, Sushi embodies the concerns and taste of its founder-director, Lynne Schuette. Until three years ago, she lived in a portion of the non-profit performing space and gallery on Eighth Avenue.

From the beginning, Schuette's programs have painted a picture of this country's cultural democracy by featuring works by Latino, African-American, Chicano, Asian, gay, feminist, homeless and even white male artists. All this long before the city bureaucracy jumped on the multicultural bandwagon.

While other contemporary art galleries have closed and forward-looking arts organizations are in financial trouble, Sushi is thriving. This year it will produce 65 performances and eight visual art shows featuring work by nearly a hundred artists. Rentals account for another score of performances each year now that Sushi has become the city's most active center for contemporary dance.

Sushi has no debts and a budget that jumped from \$10,000 in 1980 to \$87,353 in 1985 to \$230,000 in 1989.

"Sushi has single-handedly kept forefront art in front of the public here," said choreographer John Malaschock. "To have someone of Lynne's integrity and intelligence here is a blessing. It's very heartening to have an organization like this suddenly come into its own for all of us."

Malaschock is president of the San Diego Area Dance Alliance, which presents a bi-monthly showcase of experimental dance at Sushi.

Situated between E and F streets in a part of downtown where many still fear to tread, Sushi consists of a second-floor performance space of 2,160 square feet and two medium-width corridors that provide 140 feet of galleries.

Though Sushi has nights when only a handful of patrons attend a show, it also has a faithful audience averaging somewhere around 85 per performance for such events as its annual spring Neofest.

Steve Durland, editor of *High Performance* magazine, commented, "Sushi and other alternative spaces

in this country have managed to develop what I would call a more open-minded audience... more open to experimental work."

Schuette's commitment and personal warmth — she is still usually there at the makeshift box office — give the place the kind of intimate ambience that accounts, as much as her programming, for the loyalty of the audience.

That programming reflects several trends in the performing and visual arts: the predominantly female cast of what's left of the avant-garde; the many arts involved in contemporary performance; and the multicultural sources of inspiration of both.

In his study of the American avant-garde since 1970, Henry M. Sayre argues that as art left modernism behind, the avant-garde became largely female. Almost by definition, American modernist painters ignored "social and political realities," Sayre says. Female artists, aware of their cultural context and the sexual politics of the art world, tended to shift from painting to performance.

A look at Sushi's performance history would bolster his point. How did all this come about? And in conservative San Diego?

In the late '70s, Schuette was a painter supporting herself as a waitress. "I wanted to learn how to get my work shown, so I volunteered for the Escondido Regional Arts Council. They let me curate and install and do the publicity for three shows," Schuette said.

Then she called June Gutfleisch, director of a new community-based arts program downtown. Schuette wanted to quit waitressing and learn a marketable skill using a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) grant.

Eventually Schuette became the assistant director and grants writer for Community Arts in the program's glory days in the historic Knights of Pythias Building, since torn down for Horton Plaza.

Schuette was already known as a good grant writer when the CETA money dried up. She organized a show of work by downtown visual artists and began looking for a downtown site where she could live and work.

She found the Eighth Avenue space and on Dec. 6, 1980, presented her first gala performance there — a show that included local comedian Don Victor, writer-actor Philip Dimitri Galas and Whoopi Goldberg.

Victor still performs in San Diego and regionally. Galas died of AIDS-related illness three years ago after having some success with three of his brilliant, go-for-broke shows in Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco. And Goldberg, of course, headed for Hollywood and fame on video.

Schuette was a bridge-builder by nature and hoped to link the pioneering downtown arts community and UCSD, where performance art was taught in the visual arts department by such nationally noted exponents as Eleanor and David Antin and Moira Roth. UCSD's Center for Music Experiment programmed some of its performances during a new music festival at Sushi in 1981. Included was Rachel Rosenthal, the Los Angeles feminist performer with environmental concerns, who became a Sushi regular.

This week Sushi launches another collaborative presentation. Performances Thursday through Saturday by San Francisco's Cultural Odyssey are co-sponsored by the new African American Museum of Fine Arts here. Cultural Odyssey consists of dance-actress Rhodessa

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Sushi

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Jones and jazz musician Idris Acka-moor in "I think It's Gonna Work Out Fine," a salute to rhythm and blues artists who pioneered the "jungle music" that came to be called rock 'n' roll. Playwright Ed Bullins wrote the script.

Such interdisciplinary forms — very difficult to categorize — have been a big part of Sushi's programming from the start. They almost define contemporary performance.

Schuette's vision as a producer has been shaped by her background — as woman, artist and community arts advocate. She calls her curatorial policy "horizontal," meaning she favors work that slices across a breadth of different arts rather than up and down in just dance, or just theater, or performance art. She is less interested in fixed genres than in experimental forms with certain kinds of content — contemporary, multicultural, socially aware.

For seven years, Sushi has sponsored Neofest, a spring festival of new performance works. For the last three years the festival has commissioned work from San Diego artists. And increasingly over the last four years, Sushi has functioned as the city's center for contemporary dance, both locally generated and imported.

During these first 10 years, Sushi and Schuette have earned a reputation for putting artists first. Overhead costs are kept low so performers generally earn half the take at the door.

For special events such as Neofest, they earn fees in line with those offered nationally because Schuette has tapped the pool of artists' support money of the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council and, more recently, the city of San Diego.

Artist Rosenthal says that Sushi's audience reflects a broader cross-section of people than audiences at other alternative spaces because "at Sushi, even if they don't know the name of the person she's presenting, they will go knowing they'll see something interesting and probably worthwhile."

The careers of the artists Sushi nurtured early on suggest some of the changes in American performance in the last 10 years. Some of these artists have been absorbed — others would say, co-opted — by the mainstream in these times when "avant-garde" is less and less mean-

FAME AFTER SUSHI



Whoopi Goldberg made a successful transition to film.



Eric Bogosian, above, starred in a one-man comedy show for Cinemax. David Cale, right, has published his plays.



Dancer Tim Miller has shown each of his performance pieces in which his personal journey as a gay artist intersects the social context — from

Writer-performer Guillermo Gomez-Peña has explored political issues of this border region in various formats, including solo plays cre-

artists as Kai Takai, Bebe Miller, Eiko and Komo, and Elizabeth Streb. San Diego's Malashock Dance and Company was born there.

Ten years ago, Schuette represented the avant-garde in a city mostly given over to the old guard. That equation has changed some, thanks to the rebirth of the La Jolla Playhouse, the growth of the San Diego Repertory Theatre and the work of such theater groups as Plus Fire, and

such artistic collectives as the Border Art Workshop.

Though Sushi's budget has grown and the organization now has a strong national reputation, Schuette has made it clear she's not interested in becoming a launching pad for mainstream careers. She doesn't want, as she puts it, "to grow up to be a slick theater organization producing entertainment."

Her note in every program for this

10th anniversary year describes her work best:

"The open-minded spirit and passion of our audience towards new art counteracts the hypocritical hoopla of those who take away our freedom to think, feel, and express ourselves. As we all know, art can be transcendent or cloying, riveting or trivial, profound or boring. All has been presented at Sushi in the attempt to give artists a voice."

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Solo performers Whoopi Goldberg and Eric Bogosian have moved into films. English-born David Cale, New York's Karen Finley and Holly Hughes, and the Bay Area's John O'Keefe publish their writing, and increasingly are being reviewed as theater artists, writers of solo plays.

Rosenthal, the performance artist concerned with feminist and environmental issues, is a painter-turned-dancer, writer and performer. She won an Obie (Off-Broadway Theater Award) last year for her "Rachel's Brain."

plays.

Dancer Tim Miller has shown each of his performance pieces in which his personal journey as a gay artist intersects the social context — from his childhood in conservative Whittier to scary days living with violence and the AIDS crisis in New York to a return to the Golden State.

The Los Angeles Poverty Department, a skid-row theater troupe directed by John Malpede, has enhanced awareness of the edgy lives that homeless people lead. From Ireland has come Nigel Rolfe, with his body painting. And from Leningrad, as an unofficial part of the Treasures of the Soviet Union arts festival, came Derevo, a six-member performance collective inspired by Japanese *butoh* dance.

Writer-performer Guillermo Gomez-Peña has explored political issues of this border region in various formats, including solo plays created as Sushi's unofficial artist-in-residence. For his "Border Brujo," he recently won a Bessie (New York Dance and Performance Award).

Since Vicki Wolf took over as Sushi's associate director two years ago, the number of contemporary dance performances has increased and the quality improved. Last weekend Sushi sponsored a program by New York postmodern dancer Molissa Fenley, including two performances at the historic Spreckels Theater downtown.

Sushi also introduced the city to such important international dance

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