

ARTISTIC SOCIAL ACTIVISM: SARUS Festival returns for fourth year to challenge artists, audiences and activists

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The sarus crane is an interesting bird. It's the tallest of the flying species, standing up to 5-feet and 11-inches, with an awe-inspiring wingspan. Overall gray in color, its bright red head stands out, but its displays of dance-like movements, grace and romantic cultural significance are partly why it's been a symbol for the Alban Elved Dance Company in Wilmington for years. It's also the namesake of the company's SARUS Festival, held annually in August.



INTERACTIVE EXPERIMENTS: 'adam-mah' with Karola Luettringhaus takes place August 16, 20 and 22 at the Community Arts Center. Photo by Jeff Cravotta

"The sarus bird dances beautifully [and] the SARUS Festival began as a dance festival," explains Karola Lüttringhaus, artistic and executive director of SARUS and Alban Elved Dance Company. The festival returns for its fourth year from Saturday, August 15, through Sunday, August 23, with the theme "barriers, borders, territoriality." The purpose: To focus on social activism through art.

For Lüttringhaus and festival players, the festival fulfills two crucial needs: Bring complementary and unique professional work and art to Wilmington, and offer local artists and community members meaningful professional opportunities. "Wilmington is a tough turf for artists to make a living and to exchange with cutting edge artists," she says. "The funding situation for the arts is bleak [and] the SARUS Festival seeks to broaden the art offerings by inviting a good number of non-mainstream artists and those that are politically active."

Each year SARUS spans various venues for performances, exhibits and workshops. For the first time, it will have a home base at Ansell Studio in the Hannah Block Community Arts Center (120 S. 2nd St.). With a lot of emphasis on experimentation and site-specific works, other locations to host festival events include Bellamy Mansion Museum, Hannah Block Community Arts Center's main stage, Greenfield Lake, Wabi Sabi Warehouse, and Jengo's Playhouse. Plus, artists will infiltrate various apartments and streets of downtown.

Peter Verboten of Berlin, Germany, is doing three performance workshops, including "Everyday—Homeplay," on Saturday, August 22 at 8 p.m., 8:45 p.m., 9:30 p.m. and 10:15 p.m. in the yellow cabin at Jengo's Playhouse (815 Princess St.). He will share his work based on interviews conducted in Wilmington about perceptions of Germany, German culture and the everyday life of its people, as well as the significance of working in private spaces, or apartments.

"One of his interests is to get people to share some aspects of privacy in the context of an artistic exploration to help us understand our cultural makeup and identity," Lüttringhaus says.

This year's festival encourages more community participation and discussion, too—specifically for youngsters. They have a new youth program, and Lüttringhaus will present "The Suitcase Garden," a 30-minute dance theatre performance on the cycle of life for young audiences ages 5 and up. Performed on August 15, 17 and 18 at Ansell Studio, the piece follows a woman who holds all her memories in a suitcase, such as the house she grew up in, the river nearby and her garden.

Film and digital imagery will make waves during the fest on Saturday, August 15, at 11:30 a.m. In the 30-minute documentary "TERRA NULLIUS" (Ansell Studio, 120 S. 2nd St.)—meaning "no man's land" in Latin—four people explain what "home" means to them. The movie delves into what separates and unites us as a people or as individuals.

Jacqueline Olive will offer an artist talk and lecture demonstration at the Bellamy Mansion (503 Market St.) on Monday, August 17, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.. Her film, "Always in Season," covers lynchings in the U.S., specifically the recent one of 17-year-old Lennon Lacy in Bladenboro, NC. The movie covers relatives of perpetrators and victims of lynchings in four communities, who still grapple with ongoing effects.

"Their stories represent the scope of lynching since 1882, and speak to the multi-generational impact of the violence on everyone in hundreds of communities across the country where lynching happened."

Though an intense and challenging subject, Olive links this history of racial terrorism also to police violence and killings of black Americans today, of which she continues with her shorter installation, *TERRORISM*, an offshoot of the film, which can be seen in the slave quarters at Bellamy Mansion, on Sunday, August 23 at 6:30 p.m.

"*TERRORISM* is my way of extending the conversation," Olive tells of the multimedia piece. It's accompanied by Billie Holiday's haunting song about lynching, "Strange Fruit," interpreted by Tanya Fermin. It's filled with images from the exhibit "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America," which was hung as part of the Allen-Littlefield Collection at the New York Historical Society.

“Photographers would set up their cameras and photograph spectators posing with the brutalized bodies of the victims. Those photos would then be turned into postcards, and people would send them through the mail with incongruous messages, like ‘This is the barbecue we had last summer. Your son, Joe.’”

The message was scribed on a photo of the charred body of Jesse Washington, lynched in Waco, Texas in 1916, with Joe’s left shoulder about four feet away from the hanging body.

For a full schedule of the SARUS Fest, times and locations, visit sarusfestival.org.

DETAILS:

SARUS Festival

August 15-23 • Various locations

Tickets: \$5 to \$30

Passes: \$40-\$150 *Tickets for individual programs at door only.

www.sarusfestival.org/tickets