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# YEAR IN REVIEW: 2015 art scene pushed the envelope with some great results


In the past decade, major art institutions on the North Shore have taken enormous risks — and make enormous progress in doing so. Artists taking risks means individuals seeing life on a different plane. So let’s acknowledge risk-taking of another kind — the kind that involves promising money, time and ex...

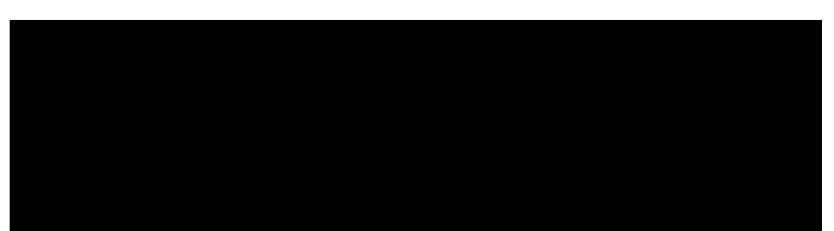
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Violinist Keir GoGwilt performs in Song Cycle at Peabody Essex Museum. COURTESY PHOTO / John Andrews, Creative Salem

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Violinist Keir GoGwilt performs in Song Cycle at Peabody Essex Museum. COURTESY PHOTO / John Andrews, Creative Salem



By Keith Powers / capeann@wickedlocal.com

Posted Dec. 28, 2015 at 8:47 PM

SALEM  
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SALEM

In the past decade, major art institutions on the North Shore have taken enormous risks — and make enormous progress in doing so.

Try to remember what the Peabody Essex Museum looked like before its Moshe Safdie-designed wing was added, or what the Cape Ann Museum experience was like before it entirely refurbished its interior. How about life before the Shalin Liu Performance Center, when musical

offerings in Rockport consisted of six fleeting weeks in the summer? Or before smaller, more intimate presenters like the Manchester Summer Chamber Music festival or Trident and Flatrocks galleries in Gloucester even existed?

We're accustomed to praising risk-taking in an artist, and rightfully so. Artists taking risks means individuals seeing life on a different plane. So let's acknowledge risk-taking of another kind — the kind that involves promising money, time and expertise, and promising to engage friends and colleagues in similar endeavors — in order to create a nurturing place for artists to thrive.

The van Otterloos, Carlsons, Parkers and dozens of others, who bought into the ambitions of Peabody Essex Museum's director Dan Monroe, and transformed downtown Salem into an international art destination. Director Ronda Faloon and her board, who have made the Cape Ann Museum into a genuine source of pride. John and Molly Byrnes, Phil and Eve Cutter, Alec Dingee and Susan Gray — along with Shalin Liu herself and others — who transformed a month's worth of summer performances into a year-round magnet for music in downtown Rockport.

And let's include the board and staff of the Gloucester Stage Company, who have come in for their lumps in this space in the past. Under new artist director Robert Walsh, and board president Robert Boulrice, the theater re-energized this summer, expanding its season substantially.

More importantly, they introduced a robust Collaborative program, bringing aspiring theater professionals to supplement every position at the company. The result: new works like the challenging "A Measure of Normalcy," which was far from a finished product, but with its small-screen inspired method of storytelling, gave a glimpse at what theater might become in a decade or so.

Individuals like Matthew Swift at Trident, and Anne-Marie Crotty with Cynthia Switzer Roth at



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Flatrocks, do work on a personal scale. They make every effort not just to represent artists and have their work reach the buying public, but also to turn their spaces into performance venues that stretch the notion of a gallery in new directions.

As do Ina and Lisa Hahn with their supporters at Windover Center for the Performing Arts, not only keeping after the cyclical task of fundraising, but making sure that events like the Dusan Tynek Dance Theatre residency return annually — and that magical, once-here-then-gone-forever performances like the Quarry Dances continue.

Everyone who has donated money, given their time and shared their expertise could not possibly be acknowledged in this fashion — and that’s not why they do it, anyway. Take a risk. Support some institution that has benefited your own life in some way — and become a participant in what has been a vital addition to life on the North Shore.

## A Year in Review

The splashiest art exhibitions this season were both at the Peabody Essex Museum — and both were significantly oversold. The summer blockbuster, “American Epics: Thomas Hart Benton and Hollywood,” was terrifically curated, but the art itself was far too one-dimensional to be of profound interest. And the popular Strandbeest exhibition — Theo Jansen’s self-powered dream dinosaurs, which roamed greater Boston from the Greenway to Crane Beach to PEM’s Dodge gallery — was really a science show, not an art exhibition.

That doesn’t mean there weren’t some timeless appraisals done in gallery spaces. “Strokes of Genius: Women Artists of New England” may be the show that changes the Rockport Art Association from a member-centric collection of artists interested in their own work to a real destination for art appreciators. “John Sloan: Gloucester Days” at the Cape Ann Museum was terrific, but CAM’s real highlight was Roger Martin’s memorable retrospective, which coincided sadly with the artist’s death in March. It was a vigorous overview of Martin’s aesthetic, an ambitious approach that like the work of our best resident artists, places Cape Ann in a global perspective.

The “Audacious” wood sculpture exhibition at PEM, John Terelak’s retrospective at the North Shore Arts Association, and the intimate and exotic photographs of Edward Curtis at Endicott College were all shows that rewarded close attention.

Community theater thrives all over the North Shore, reaching the point where it’s impossible to keep up with every offering from every company. Salem Theatre’s move in 2016 to its new home can only bring great things; its productions of “Hamlet” and H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Thing on the Doorstep” this season were outstanding. Salem State’s theater department continues to impress: this year’s staging of Beckett shorts in February, and the compelling “Grapes of Wrath” in November, show what good directors can do with dedicated student players. On the Cape, the intrepid Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe’s non-Bard dalliance, a November production of Terrence McNally’s “And Away We Go,” was a treat.

Musically, one could pick any one of the performances at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival and remember it as a highlight. RCMF has taken its rightful place among the great summer festivals in the country, and let’s hope for continued success as a year-round venture. An opening night performance by Yo-Yo Ma was unforgettable for everyone — that goes without saying. Concerts by Shanghai, Escher and Cuarteto Latinoamericano brought more understanding to the depth of the string quartet literature; an appearance by composer/pianist Matthew Aucoin gave a glimpse to the future; Richard Stoltzman and Yehudi Wyner paid a personal tribute to their late friend, the composer William Thomas McKinley.

That Aucoin maintains a musical residency at the Peabody Essex Museum, giving concerts in non-traditional settings, with a composer’s eye to what unusual works can be paired in performance, should be a gift for years to come. More affiliations of this kind should come from PEM, which has the resources and insight to support more live events.

At the end of the year, it’s a blessing to count the risks and rewards that make artistic life vibrant on the North Shore.

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## » EVENTS CALENDAR

<b>TUE</b>	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON
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Tuesday, December 29, 2015

**Manchester Council on Aging — Chinese Luncheon Buffet** 12:15 pm

First Parish Church Congregational Chapel

**Ninth Annual Holiday Basketball Tournament** 5:30 pm

Gloucester High School

**Ninth Annual Holiday Basketball Tournament** 7:00 pm

Gloucester High School

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Boston Center for Adult Education to host fishing industry discussion

5 Things to Do This Week, Dec. 25 through Jan. 1

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