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Arts & Entertainment

Writers' choice

This article was published on [09.28.06](#).

Best place for a private karaoke party

DJ Karaoke

Like to croon but want to avoid the embarrassment of crowing off-key in a crowded bar? For between \$30 and \$40 an hour, you can rent one of seven private karaoke university campusrooms--the kind Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson might hang out in. Like small living rooms, with black couches and coffee tables, they each feature a computerized karaoke machine (and a selection of songs in Korean, English, Chinese and Japanese) and can hold up to 15 of your closest friends. Food and drinks are for sale as well, and the place is open late: 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. Sunday through Thursday and 5 p.m. to 4 a.m. Friday and Saturday. *9261 Folsom Boulevard, Suite 605; (916) 362-1234.*

Best reason to revisit the Crocker Art Museum

Crocker Contemporaries

Show up for the Crocker Contemporaries series (every fourth Thursday), and you're bound to discover something interesting: artist Stephen Kaltenbach bashfully describing his conversion to Christianity, a roomful of people complaining about the town's ugliest public art, a virtual tour of Blankblank's studios or a break-dancing exhibition. Whatever's on offer probably will enhance your relationship with art and definitely will be accompanied by hors d'oeuvres, beverages and an opportunity to tour the museum's latest exhibits. The \$10 events are free for museum members. *216 O Street, (916) 264-5423, www.crockerartmuseum.org.*

Best one-two punch for partygoers

Club Pow! and Synthetic at Press Club

Sick of the Friday-Saturday club scene and its shady confluence of bemused suburbanites and jaded urban dwellers? Why not give the Press Club a try on off nights? Every other Sunday, Ira Skinner (of the Evening Episode) and Evan Schneider (Tha Fruitbat) put on Synthetic, an evening of drum 'n' bass, IDM, experimental, breakbeat, jungle--electronic beats you can move to. And, if you don't get too hammered on Sunday, indulge yourself in a bit of déjà vu with Club Pow!, a Monday-night indie-rock extravaganza (put on by Skinner). Pow! has become, in just one year, the place to make your weekly grid appearance. The Evening Episode, Dusty Brown, Nevada Backwards, Pets and countless higher-profile out-of-town acts have laid down the law at Pow!--where were ya? *2030 P Street, (916) 444-7914, www.myspace.com/clubpow, www.myspace.com/synthetic/sunday.*

Best place to hear a mariachi band

iTaqueria Garibaldi

It's like one big Mexican fiesta when almost a dozen guys in matching suit coats and tight pants studded with shiny buttons start strolling among diners who are busily draining buckets of bottled beer. A sooty-eyed crooner, some melancholy guitars and horns that blast over diners' heads turn this good-sized taqueria into a night of Carnival every Thursday, prompting their most avid fans to sing along loudly and passionately in Spanish. Thursdays get a little crazy, so you'll want to go back on other nights of the week to sample the taqueria's many inexpensive and amazingly tasty dishes. *1841 Howe Ave, (916) 924-0108.*



Best place to hear a mariachi band:
Taqueria Garibaldi
PHOTO BY LARRY DALTON

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Best new use for a historic brick (fire)house.

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Best professional theater

Capital Stage, on the Delta King in Old Sacramento

This is a tough category because several established contenders fielded some fine shows during the past year. But the best overall record was posted by the newcomer, Capital Stage, which went professional a little more than a year ago. We admired its production of *The Shape of Things*, a dark, gritty, cautionary tale about a personal makeover. We thought highly of *Relatively Speaking*, the British comedy about infidelity. And Capital Stage's production of *Proof*, a perceptive look into mathematical genius, madness and father-daughter dynamics, was nearly letter perfect. We also got a kick out of *Humble Boy*, a very quirky comedy about honeybees, astrophysics and *Hamlet*. And this summer's *Stones in His Pockets* was a two-man tour de force. Credit artistic director Stephanie Gularte (who starred in several shows) and managing director Peter Mohrmann for major contributions. *1000 Front Street in Old Sacramento, (916) 995-5464, www.capitalstagecompany.com.*

Best bargain for animal lovers

Half-price Tuesdays at the Folsom Zoo Sanctuary

It's not every day you can stand 20 feet from a tiger, but when you pay just \$2 to stand 20 feet from a tiger, it's a victory indeed. On

the first Tuesday of every month, admission at the Folsom Zoo Sanctuary is half-price--meaning an entire family of four can play peekaboo with some monkeys, watch black bears frolic in a pool and see a rare white peacock for less than \$10. Add to that a menagerie of wolves, bobcats, foxes, pigs, owls, hawks and some creatures you've never heard of, and your total cost per animal turns out to be about 10 cents. As the word "sanctuary" implies, the animals here have nowhere else to go. Some were raised as wild pets and relinquished when their owners realized, for instance, that wolves weren't dog-park material. Others were injured in the wild. The tigers, Misty and Pouncer, were confiscated from an illegal tiger-breeding operation in Southern California. Detailed exhibits tell each animal's story. Come early before the animals crawl into dark corners for their afternoon naps--although, at these prices, you can afford to keep coming back until you've seen every resident up close. 403 Stafford Street in Folsom, (916) 351-3527.

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Best street scribe



Barely Spared III, Esq.
According to one of his fliers, dispensers are at 19th and J streets, 29th Street and Capitol Avenue, Alhambra Boulevard and N Street, and other unspecified locations.

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Best evidence that Sacramento supports a thriving art scene.

Dear Barely Spared III, Esq.:
Your jittery, pulpy, emphatically capitalized, typo-laden short stories are just so totally whack. Easily worth the suggested \$1 donation. We love that you apparently still use a typewriter and free-hand illustrate and assemble the stories yourself and plant them around Midtown in makeshift dispensers chained to phone poles. And we love the weirdness of what you write: "I'LL NEVER GET OUT OF QUENTIN NOW I DID THE CRIME AND NOW I HAVE TO GO, WAIT JUST ONE DARNED JIMMINY MINUTE, I KNOW, I'LL TAKE THE 50 GRAND I SAVED FOR MY NEW 300 SERIES CAR AND PAY OFF THE JUDGE WHICH IS ABOUT AS STRAIGHT AS A WOLF-MANS BACK LEG." You're like the truck-stop-abandoned lovechild of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gertrude Stein, fresh from a bar fight and high on Special K. Struggle on, artist!

—Jonathan Kiefer

Best production of a Shakespeare play

Twelfth Night at the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival
Bay Area director Nancy Carlin came up with a marvelous comedic love story, moving the setting to Pepperland, the colorful fantasyland that served as the location for the Beatles-related animated film *Yellow Submarine*. A lovely concept, good acting and a very effective score by Michael Rasbury evoked the psychedelic sounds of the mid-'60s. Sand Harbor State Park, three miles south of Incline Village in Nevada; (775) 832-1616; www.laketahoeshaakespeare.com.

Best music venue off the grid

Sophia's Thai Kitchen
Sophia's Thai Kitchen excels because it does its own thing and does it well--with a tropical theme that invokes relaxation instead of the luau heavens. Sophia's patio faces one of Davis' main streets where one can listen to music and people-watch at the same time. Inside, there is a tropical fish tank to mesmerize the eyes while the ears are enchanted with tunes. Though they're often underrated when it comes to live music, Sophia's offers a variety of chairs, booths and stools on which to kick back and enjoy the music. 129 E Street, Suite E, in Davis; (530) 758-4333; www.sophiasthaikitchen.com.

Best change of pace

B Street Theatre
Producing artistic director Buck Busfield knows his audience well, and in recent years, he's gotten very good at giving that audience what it's come to expect: bright, clever (and sometimes rather predictable) comedies. But during the past year, Busfield programmed some very interesting and attractive alternatives to the standard B Street fare--including a handsome staging of an honest-to-God full-length Irish classic (Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*) and a dark political satire depicting big government and the military-industrial complex run amok (Sam Shepard's *The God of Hell*). Both shows were refreshing and very well done. Keep up the good work, Buck. 2711 B Street, (916) 443-5300, www.bstreettheatre.org.

Best new summer concert series

American Bach Soloists at the Mondavi Center
For years and years, it was the same. If you wanted to hear classical music during the summer, you had to leave town and go to a festival like Music in the Mountains in Nevada County. The American Bach Soloists, a professional, San Francisco-based group, recognized an opportunity and started offering a weekend series at the Mondavi Center in July. Directed by Jeffrey Thomas (who also teaches at UC Davis), the concerts featured chamber music, from baroque to early classical, performed on period instruments. They not only were good; they also drew well. The Bach Soloists will be back next summer, for sure. In the meantime, they'll present their regular season at Davis Community Church and the Mondavi Center from December into May. (415) 621-7900, www.americanbach.org.

Best solo show

Jack Gallagher's *What He Left*
Funnyman Jack Gallagher turned the autobiographical monologue into his own special art form during his run at the B Street Theatre. In *What He Left*, Gallagher used childhood memories and home recordings made by his late father to create an onstage memoir that was both intensely personal and something universal. The work shows remarkable parallels to Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, revealing an emotionally distant dad working as a salesman in a far-flung New England territory, getting in trouble with his boss and keeping his depression hidden from the kids. 2711 B Street, (916) 443-5300, www.bstreettheatre.org.

Best pick-me-up after a long workweek

Midtown's weird, random street art
In recent months, someone's been getting creative along the railroad tracks, gracing our streets with miniature works of art. Like the 6-by-8-inch pieces of particle board and plywood--hastily painted with things like a pointy angel creature or a dialogue bubble reading "Skate or die!"--that some bored Midtowner has been screwing to utility poles along 20th and 21st streets. Another artsy person cut a newspaper page into the shape of an octopus, colored it with red crayon and black marker, christened it "Grumpy Puss" and pasted it to a traffic-signal box on 21st and L streets. And small stencils of trucks, cars and cranes adorn the sidewalk at the 21st Street alley between L and K streets. Keep making your weird shit,



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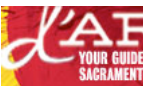
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music



Sacramentans. We'll keep smiling at it.

Best airport art

"Samson" at the Sacramento International Airport

When weary travelers reach their destinations, they usually disembark and then stare into the dark void of the conveyor-belt mouth, hoping their baggage will emerge miraculously from behind the plastic curtain. In 1998, sculptor Brian Goggin built in a sense of wonder and humor for patrons of Terminal A's baggage claim. The two 23-foot pillars of colorful, old suitcases seemingly ready to topple from the luggage cart below cause visitors to point, gasp and keep their eyes moving from floor to ceiling. "Samson" stirs curiosity about where the bags' owners have been, where they were going, what they were like and why they left their baggage behind. 6900 Airport Boulevard, www.metaphorm.org.



Best pick-me-up after a long workweek: Midtown's weird, random street art
PHOTO BY SARAH SOL

Best new singer-songwriter

Dean Haakenson of Be Brave Bold Robot

www.hebraveboldrobot.org.

Dearest Dean,

Soulful and sublime songwriter, you captured my heart during your band's Sammies Showcase performance at Marilyn's, making me an instant convert to your religion of rock! Oh, the passion! Oh, the unbridled energy and heartfelt angst! Where have you been? Only playing in public a year, you say? Impossible. Subsequent listening to your music proved addictive, as your lyrics revealed the depth of an old soul belying your years. I want more, more, more!

Not too old to be a groupie,
Amy Yannello



Best "better late than never" musical

A Little Night Music

Like many Sacramentans, we love the Music Circus, Sacramento's hugely popular summer musical series. We also love Stephen Sondheim's sophisticated musical, *A Little Night Music*. The graceful show, set entirely to a waltz beat, dates from 1973, is widely regarded as an American classic and is the source of the famous anthem "Send in the Clowns." This summer, more than 30 years after the musical's Broadway premiere, the Music Circus staged *A Little Night Music* for the very first time. What took 'em so long? Perhaps the storyline--which includes multiple acts of marital infidelity--gave the management pause. But better late than never. This summer's production of *A Little Night Music* was a marvelous treat--and we hope that the Music Circus will feel empowered to stage it again someday. 1419 H Street, (916) 557-1999, www.calm.com.

Best on-air hour of '90s nostalgia

Nikia's Throwback Mix at Noon on 103.5 the Bomb

Monday through Friday on 103.5 FM, (916) 766-1035 (request line), www.1035thebomb.com.

Hoarding bubblegum pop, grunge rock, hip-hop like clutter, radio presets of messy chatter

until noon organizes Pharcyde, Mary J. Blige 2 Live Crew, a '90s transition to

matching leggings and shoes, jumping from elementary to middle school

when I still had some grasp on what was cool. This hour passes in beats

and flashbacks, songs like simple stacks of love letters, lyrics archiving desire--

longing with less booty shaking and bling.

—Donna Lee



Best production of an American classic

A Raisin in the Sun

This classic script by Lorraine Hansberry comes from the 1950s--an era when audiences were willing to sit still for a full-length drama. (Nowadays, people tend to get restless after two-and-a-half hours.) Director Philip Charles Sneed took a risk and presented the play at full length, and the gamble paid off. The show was a significant artistic success, and audiences loved it. Credit the fine performances by local actress Danielle Moné Thrower (as Beneatha) and understudy Billy Eugene Jones (who, according to many, did better as the male lead than the show's nominal star, TV actor Steve Jones). Sacramento Theatre Company, incidentally, will stage another American classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in October. 1419 H Street, (916) 443-6722, www.sactheatre.org.

Best fans at a live performance

2Me's groupies

The dedicated fans of the folk/rock band 2Me exist as a family of friends who love to get together to sing and dance alongside some great music. Whether at home or touring, 2Me always packs a live performance with regulars, newcomers and the intrigued passers-by. It doesn't hurt that the group has the cutest fans around, wonderful women who threaten to steal everyone's attention from the rockin' band. Known for its parties, such as June's famous Party Bus, 2Me brings out the best disciples in Sacramento. www.2memusic.com.

Best theatrical production on a university campus

Death of a Salesman

This show on the UC Davis campus equaled many of the shows we saw on the region's professional stages this year. Veteran actor Tom McCauley (who worked big shows in New York and decided in midlife to get a master's degree at UC Davis) gave a memorable performance as 20th-century everyman Willy Loman, while onetime UC Davis student Kent Nicholson (now a Bay Area professional) returned to his alma mater to direct. A handsome production all the way around. 222 Wright Hall, One Shields Avenue in Davis, (530) 752-0888, <http://theatredance.ucdavis.edu>.

Best place to roll-bounce



Trust Your Ears

Jackson on MMA, Ross Hammond and Pow!!

Dance Gavin Dance and Sacramento post-hardcore

All signs point to a softer, gentler hardcore.

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An unassuming performer makes a mess.

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Foothill Skate Inn

While other rinks seem to exist solely for birthday parties and the hokey pokey, Foothill Skate Inn keeps it real. The DJs spin hip-hop tracks in the evenings to keep the kids dancing, some on homemade Converse skates and others with their own iPod soundtracks in their ears. When the first notes of a favorite anthem ring out, the crowd whoops, hands wave in the air, and rumps start twitching. Long trains of skaters weave through the crowds holding onto each other's shirts. It's a difficult scene to skate through but a beautiful one to behold. *4700 Auburn Boulevard, (916) 488-4700, www.foothillskateinn.com.*

Best professional actress**Janis Stevens**

What a year! Janis Stevens wowed us in several different ways. First, she gave a terrific performance in the title role of *Becoming Julia Morgan*, which premiered at the California Stage. Bringing this highly productive, publicity-adverse character to life was a remarkable feat--Stevens did it with a delicately shaded portrayal that made expert use of small gestures. Then Stevens went to the other end of the spectrum, playing a selfish, domineering, outspoken mother from hell in Capital Stage's *Humble Boy*. During 2006, Stevens also got a Drama Desk nomination in New York for her solo performance as Vivien Leigh (which she developed in part in Sacramento).

Best random act of artistic audacity***L'ordre de reptilian du jour (The reptilian agenda)*, a short film by Ashley Fleshman**

Ashley Fleshman took up the 2006 Sacramento International Film and Music Festival's 10x10 Filmmaker Challenge--to make a flick of no more than 10 minutes in no more than 10 days--with aplomb. Having bravely led a discussion on the brutal cinematic angst of Gaspar Noé at the French Film Fest a few weeks earlier, Fleshman went on hilariously and ingeniously to send up arty, existential Euro-poser vanity in his own nimble short film, *L'ordre de reptilian du jour (The reptilian agenda)*. The brief tale of a suicidal mope narrating his despair in pouty pidgin French (with help from subtitles), *L'ordre* is but one of Fleshman's "Random Acts," an ongoing series of happenings he describes as a "mixture of performance art, independent media street theatre, live music, and poetry." His character in the movie may be "overcome with shame and remorse," but the actor and director should be duly proud. www.randomacting.com/home.html.

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