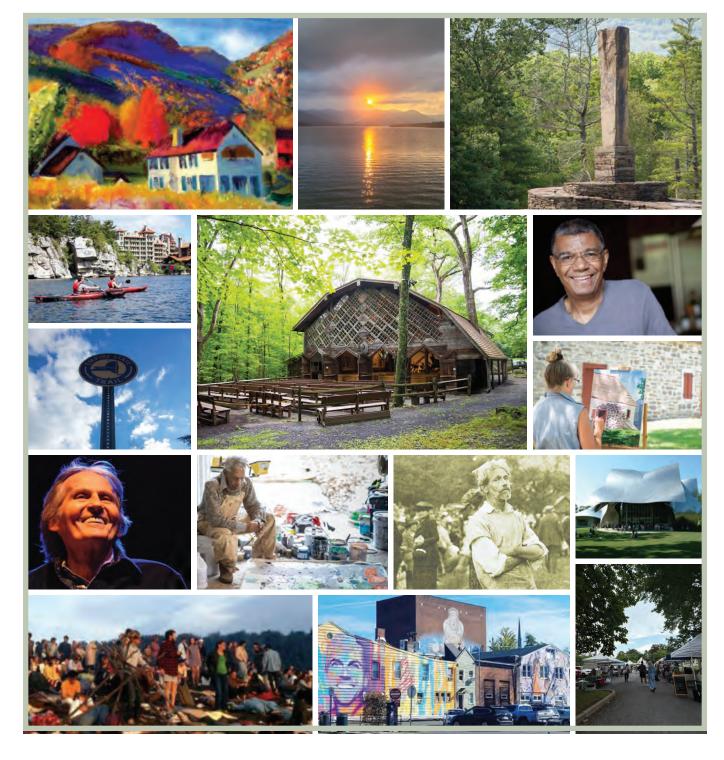
culture

LOCAL ART & MUSIC

SUMMER 2025



Sound check

Mapping Ulster County's many live music venues and the scenes behind them

by Zac Shaw

T'S NO SECRET Ulster County's music scene is hot. There are at least a dozen music venues in Woodstock alone. Same for Kingston. If you include the ever-expanding list of cafés, restaurants and shops that host live music performances, there are nearly 100 places to hear music within county limits. That's not normal! There are metropolises that have smaller music scenes.

With so many options, navigating Ulster County's live music map can be daunting. Perhaps the best way of finding your path to an unforgettable sonic destination is to start by genre. What kind of music do you like? Because we've pretty much got it all...

Americana / Roots / Honkytonk

Old-timey music is all the rage in our county, particularly the kind you can dance to.

Guitarwiz Connor Kennedy might have kicked off the most hoppin' honkytonk night at Kingston's **VFW Post 1286** — you'll find it packed with a fun crowd Wednesdays through the end of July, with lots of boot scootin' to an all-star band.

The sprawling **Outpost BBQ at Kerhonkytonk Roadhouse** (a mouthful, like their generously-portioned barbecue) is rustic church (figuratively) for Americana, roots, zydeco, honkytonk, bluegrass and other classic styles. Top talent comes through here because the owner truly prizes musicianship.

Kingston's queer-forward **Unicorn Bar** boasts a huge dancefloor under disco balls, perfect for getting down to swing, country and other vintage flavors of music. You can really catch any genre of music here, but it's for sure a honkytonk hotbed.

You can find these antique and vintage genres pop up in many other places.



NEIL HOWARD

Colony Woodstock hosts almost any genre of music you can think of.



LAUREN THOMAS

The Lemon Squeeze in New Paltz has a baby grand front and center and a focus on classic jazz and blues.

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Woodstock is full of them: Station Bar & Curio, Levon Helm Studios, Colony, Bearsville Theater and Catskill Mountain Pizza; in Kingston at West Kill Supply; in Marlboro at The Falcon; in Saugerties at The Local; at The Ashokan Center in Olivebridge; and modern-day Americana at the Phoenicia Playhouse (put on by Flying Cat Music).

Jazz

Our county has a thriving jazz scene, from open mic nights all the way up to world-class talent.

The Lemon Squeeze in New Paltz is all jazzed up with nightly live piano performances, moody mid-century ambiance, and a serious cocktail program. With a baby grand front and center and a focus on classic jazz and blues, it's become the go-to spot for locals and visitors looking for an intimate, elevated night of music.

Every Saturday night, **Lydia's Café** in Stone Ridge hosts intimate jazz performances with top regional talent. Experience a cozy, intimate vibe with excellent food.

Also serving dinner alongside jazz is **The Falcon** in Marlboro, known for be-



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ing a destination for songs that groove. It's the jazz musician's choice, with plenty of opportunities to jump on stage and join in, but spectators love it for its rustic vibe, beautiful surroundings and lively acoustics.

Pearl Moon in Woodstock has been anchoring the local jazz and blues scene for years, featuring both local and touring talent. It's another venue with incredible food and drink, and the atmosphere is somehow both laid back and electric at the same time. They do evening concerts and late morning/early afternoon brunch performances.

Maverick Concert Hall is another key jazz spot, nestled in the woods outside of Woodstock. It's a truly magical experience to witness a show here within century-plus-old architecture rendering an amazing acoustic environment. Jazz legends like Jack Dejonette play here, along with contemporary virtuosos.

Other jazz connections include **Colony** in Woodstock, along with **UPAC**, **The Lace Mill** and **Chromatic Studios** in Kingston, and **The Local** in Saugerties.

Rock / Punk / Metal

Ulster County has always had a loud underground music scene, and while it's waxed and waned over the years, lately it seems to be experiencing a resurgence.

Snapper Magee's is a punk rock dive bar mainstay in Kingston. And while it's under new ownership, not much has changed over the decades. Between popular Sunday matinees and more traditional late-night bills, it's a fun atmosphere to let loose and rock out.

Over the last few months, Kingston's **Night Swim** has taken a page from its former incarnation as The Anchor and is doing live shows more regularly, many of them of the high-volume variety. Local punks and city bands gather to drink cheap beer and get loud. The kitchen's open late and the bar food here is spectacular.

Tubby's in Kingston is known for probing the more experimental, cutting-edge side of music, and that includes a healthy dose of rock, punk and heavier acts. It's an intimate venue which regularly draws bands that play for hundreds of people.

Snug Harbor in New Paltz is another beloved dive, with its general attitude of "go nuts". It's a fiercely local establishment, supporting local musicians for decades. Since there's not as much



Every Saturday night, Lydia's Café in Stone Ridge hosts intimate jazz performances with top regional talent.



RICH CALI

Tubby's in Kingston is known for a healthy dose of rock, punk and heavier acts

New Paltz nightlife as there used to be, Snug's (as locals call it) can really pack 'em in lately.

Other places you can find bands turned up to eleven in Ulster County include **Keegan Ales**, **West Kill Supply** and **Assembly** in Kingston, and **Colony** in Woodstock.

Pop / Indie

Looking for sounds that trend a little bit more toward the mainstream? Ulster

County's wealth of independent musicians and fans make for a magnetic draw — top national talent regularly drops by.

Bearsville Theater has been drawing some big names ever since music

programming was turned over to Dayglo Events in 2024, and the hits keep coming. Who wouldn't want to play or see a show here? The beloved Woodstock venue is enchanting, intimate, with immaculate

sound and lighting — truly a fantastic spot to eatch a show.

Assembly in Kingston burst onto the scene this year with a steadily growing slate of exciting bills drawn from diverse





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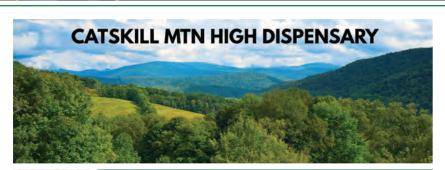
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corners of the music world. They're not pop/indie *per se*, though you can catch some catchy shows here. They're musically all over the map, but they know how to expertly curate acts that are hot right now, leading to frequent sold-out shows.

In Woodstock, **Levon Helm Studios** consistently books some of the best up-and-coming acts in contemporary Americana, light indie rock, indie pop, folk, alt-country and the softer (but no less rockin') side of rock.

Arrowwood Farms in Accord hosts some massive musical events — minifestivals, really — with some of the most widely recognized names from the indie rock and pop underground.

Other places to find strong melodies and powerful songwriting include Rough Draft, UPAC, Unicorn Bar and O+ Exchange Clinic in Kingston and The Woodstock Pub, along with Colony.

Tribute Bands

"Tribute bands" is just a gussied-up name for a cover band, but today's cover bands are typically not the bar variety you may remember from yesteryear. Thanks to modern technology and media, today's tribute bands are looking and sounding more and more like their real-world counterparts.

Colony in Woodstock is the undisputed champion of tribute bands locally, and while their booking mix is leaning a bit more toward original music these days, you can still hear bands ranging from

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Local art & music

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Ulster Publishing (est. 1972) is a Hudson Valley media company with its office at 322 Wall Street in Kingston. For more info on upcoming special sections, including how to place an ad, call (845) 334-8200, fax (845) 334-8202 or e-mail info@ hudsonvalleyone.com.





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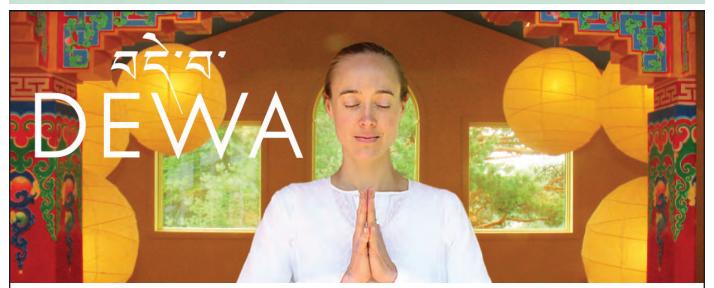
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spitting-image, note-perfect recreations of a group's hits to outfits covering music from a particular era.

Woodstock Playhouse is also known to host a few professional-grade tribute acts each year.

Tribute bands can pop up anywhere live music does, you'll find them at many of the other venues on this list.

Classical

Maverick Concert Hall hosts the longest-running chamber music festival in the entire country. Any fan of classical music must make a pilgrimage. Virtuosic musicianship is the norm here.

Saugerties Pro Musica has been holding classical concerts at **Saugerties United Methodist Church** for nearly three decades. **UPAC** in Kingston hosts operas, ballets, and other super-old-school musical productions.

Jam Bands

Jam band culture is big in these parts, from the laid-back Deadheads on up to the modern jam bands that feature elite musical prowess and epic song lengths.

If you're looking for such fare try Colo-



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Pearl Moon in Woodstock has been anchoring the local jazz and blues scene for years.

ny or Bearsville Theater in Woodstock, Snug Harbor in New Paltz, and Keegan Ales or West Kill Supply in Kingston.

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Other places to catch eclectic sonic fare in Ulster County are **Widow Jane Mine** in Rosendale, **Tubby's** and **Assembly** in Kingston.

There are other genres of music and certainly other great venues inside and outside county lines, but these suggestions should get your ears pointed in the right direction.



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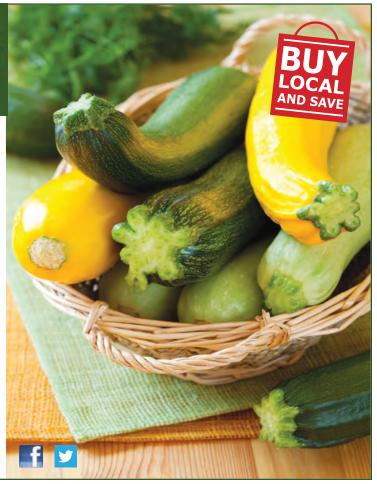
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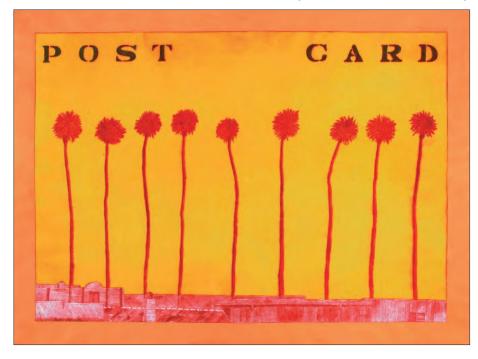
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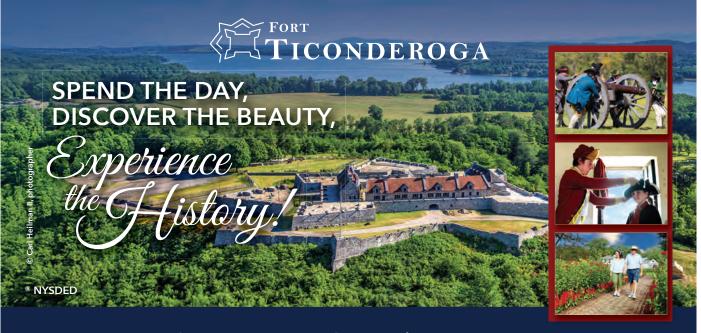
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https://www.facebook.com/TheLace-

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Art/Life Institute of Kingston

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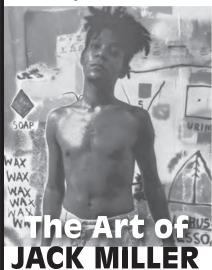
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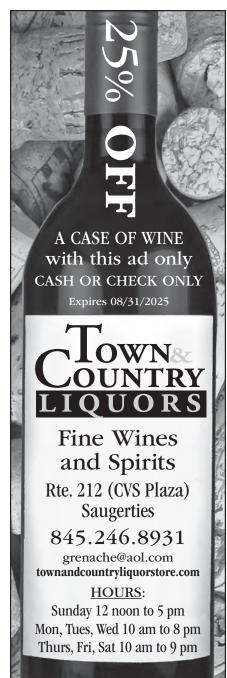
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PHOTOS BY ROKOSZ MOST

Ulster County Poet Laureate Michael Jurkovic.

Culture has 99 dragon's teeth

The many faces of Ulster County's creative community

by Rokosz Most

what we do to make each other happy. To make ourselves happy. It's how we live. It's how we should live. It's kind of the dreams that go with that. And people find creative process, hopefully in almost everything they do. I know it's not the case for most. But to me that's kind of the ideal. And when that happens, I think

we have the highest culture.

- Kinko the Clown

The local

"I think about potential culture here in Kingston over the last, let's say, few hundred years for my family. What is it? Is there something that I would like to be preserved? Stories? Experiences? The names of people? I don't know."

Community engagement coordinator for Radio Kingston Erica Brown was born in Kingston. The daytime traffic on Broadway hums past us while Brown tries to nail down the meaning of the past, in terms of Culture, with a capital C.

"I am who I am because of my experiences and the nurturing from my parents," she said. "But to look at who you are, what you are, in a deeper sense you have to look back at what has happened to the people who have come before you."

Brown says her parents and her grandparents are natives of Ulster County. With the aid of the Ulster County Truth and Reconciliation Committee, she can trace

her family back farther to the early 1700s, "as far back as we can go." Her ancestors had been enslaved.

"I listen to the stories from my parents and aunts, uncles, grandparents, their friends," she said, "and I go through the city and I observe and I listen, and I realize that there will be a point without some kind of documentation that these stories and histories and experiences will no longer be passed on."



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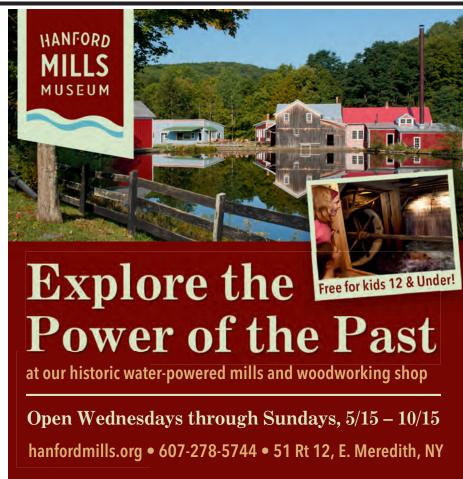
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Kinko the Clown.

According to Brown, even buildings can be made to speak.

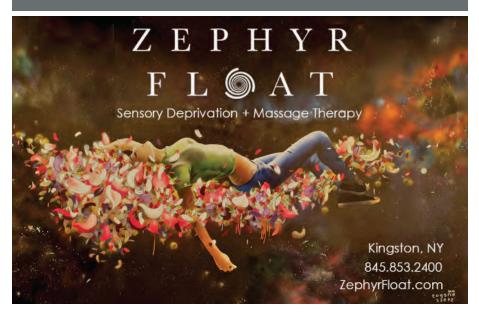
"Say this community building was named after a person. The Andy Murphy Center. Who is this person? Like who the hell is Andy Murphy at the neighborhood center? I found out that for decades he worked for the parks and rec department. If you have nothing pinpointed to even become curious about and to ask that

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question to get to an answer, then it's almost as if he never existed."

A story by the Czech-Moravian author Milan Kundera tells how the residents pulled down the street signs during the Russian invasion of his

country in an attempt to confound the tanks of the invaders. In the absence of the old street signs, the invaders put up their own. They renamed all the streets.

Most Hudson Valley residents know that the Hudson is not the original name of the river. It was renamed to honor a profiteer doing the bidding of a joint-stock trading organization named the Dutch West India Company.

The people living here when Hudson sailed up the river called themselves the Lenape. Before Hudson arrived, their ancestors are said to have lived in the valley for more than 10,000 years. They called the river the Mahicantuck.

A touch over 400 years after Hudson, the valley is now awash with profiteers, for many of whom housing is the investment of choice. They need not live here or have even ever seen the valley to own a piece of it.

Culture begins with communication set in a place. First is the gesture. Then the imitation of a sound. Bird song, maybe. Then comes speech. After that, human beings learn to use abstract symbols to communicate information. Written down, the word allows even the dead to speak.

The way culture plays out is also informed by topography. River people and mountain people, forest people, lake people.

It takes repetition and memory for a culture to arise and develop.

The poet

Leaning up against the short brick wall that separates Crown Street from the parking lot where the Kingston Saturday farmers' market is held, Michael Jurkovic, poet laureate of Ulster County, would like to believe that society could dispense with militarism altogether.

"I know it's utopian but maybe we don't need bigger sticks and bigger fires," Jurkovic said. "Maybe if we use a bigger fire to cook more food for other people.... What's wrong with that?"

Handguns and batons aren't the traditional tools of poets. Confronting the past pattern of subjugations of the weak by the strong in the United States, Jurkovic

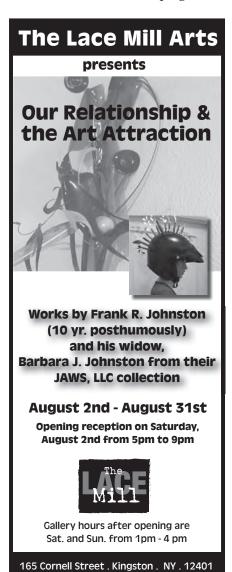
sees hope as a necessary precursor to positive change. For reaching the hearts and minds in Ulster County, Jurkovic relies on language.

"I've been doing a thing called Calling All Poets for going on 27 years, and I've been doing it here in New Paltz, you know, trying to promote poetry and the arts and things of that nature," he said. "We all have something to say. We say it in different ways, and if we don't start communicating with one another, then we're going to be all by ourselves."

Poet as canary in the coal mine. Poetry as resistance.

"Through the years, people have looked up to artists, and in any civilization that begins to fall -- as I have to say ours is doing or maybe it's even in mid-fall -- it's necessary for artists to lead the way. To kind of shine some kind of light on things."

Jurkovic has initiated a program in



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the libraries throughout the county called Poetry as Protest and Political Action.

"What I do is I ask a couple of poets to join me," he elaborated. "Toward the end of this month up in Saugerties at Inquiring Minds Bookstore, it's going to be Will Nixon and Guy Reed. And we're going to read some protest poetry, either our own, or of poets before us like Ginsberg, Muriel Rukeyser, Levertov, Kenneth Patchen. Hopefully this will, as it's done in the libraries that I've done this in already, initiate a discussion on how do we build a stronger community to combat the structures falling down all around us?"

Though he doesn't consider himself a nature poet, Jurkovic, who has been in the county for 25 years, is grateful to the impact of nature. Originally from the Bronx. He understands the draw

to downstaters living a life of concrete and asphalt.

"The river, the mountains," said the county's poet laureate. "I'm hoping that it's making people appreciate what's left of what we have here."



Erica Brown, Community Engagement Coordinator for Radio Kingston.

The clown

"We all in some way or another appropriate culture," says Keith Nelson, aka Kinko the Clown, co-founder of the Bindlestiff Family Circus. "Culture is always shifting because we take what

we see, and that's what kind of inspires who we are and what we do. It's always going to happen."

The big issue, says Nelson/Kinko, comes when people don't understand the origins of what they're engaging in.

"If youlook at the history of clown and what I do, the makeup has gone through many shifts of what's right and what's wrong. And then you mix in the comedy from Black Stage and it creates a whole other discussion. You look at clowns of color and there's a big debate on makeup."

The importance of tradition and cultural taste, waxing and waning, jumping ahead, falling out of step, each with the other, and synchingup again. Zeitgeists are the province of the artist.

"Well, we can speak for the circus or we can speak for the clown," Nelson said. "The Comedia Dell'Arte world, which is, I would say, even more derivative

of clowns than say jesters. You also have the Hopi clowns of indigenous cultures."

The Bindlestiff Family Circus grew out of a weekly variety show held at a New York City bar in the Nineties. It brought circus performers together, allowing them to find their characters and hone their craft.

"It was a little bit of drag, a little bit of late-night, a bit of clown, a little bit of sideshow," Kinko said. "We had a small troupe going and we threw everybody in the van and started touring the country."

Eventually the troupe found its way to the Hudson Valley. Based in Hudson, it has frequently come down to put on shows at Opus 40, with the southern escarpment of the Catskills looking on.

"So much of what happens here in the Hudson Valley is coming from somewhere else," said Kinko. "Art comes from so many different centers. And there's beautiful mixes. We have the higher art world, and we have the lower art world. And then you have the outsider world coming in from a whole different direction. Every now and then, you have something that just comes all left field."

The believers

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this spring a project was completed which had set out to create an inventory of the cultural assets in the county, identify the potential economic value of those assets, synchronize the efforts of the municipalities in the county to promote them, and then figure out how to link up and support the resident artists and cultural visionaries.

The arts-and-culture sector last year was estimated to support 3564 jobs and contribute more than \$814 million in total annual economic impact. Out-of-town visitors, drawn by a vibrant arts culture scene, are given credit for creating 2165 additional jobs, providing an annual \$227 million in business revenues.

Kingston common council member Sara Pasti, formerly director of the Dorsky Museum in New Paltz for more than a decade, was brought on to manage the countywide arts auditing project.

"I used to feel that the art world is like a Venn diagram," confessed Pasti. "There are the people who just make art for art's sake. Then there are the artists who make art to sell and make money. It's a financial pursuit. Then there are the galleries who sell the art. And there are the non-profits that showcase art, but aren't really in the business of selling it."

All these different elements overlap in different ways. "And you have various avenues that you pursue at different times. Then there's the relationship between museums and galleries. And artists and dealers and collectors. It's a complex business of art. And some people participate in the business aspect. And other people don't."

County legislature shair Peter Criswell is the primary driver behind the need for a countywide arts plan.

"I see a lot of what we're trying to do as being connectors," said Criswell. "Kingston has an arts commission, Saugerties has an arts commission. We'd like to try and encourage more arts commissions around the county."

In another life before the county legislature, Criswell's worldview compelled him to study both theater and cultural anthropology at Bard College. He pursued a career in live theater for over a decade, performing as an actor, and after attending the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Clown College as a clown.

"I was rappelling out of ceilings," he remembers, "I was blowing fire, I was walking on, you know, twelve-foot stilts."

Performers in the world of theater often have to put things together with scant resources. Criswell said they should receive fair pay. "There are some other systems around the country that kind of value artists more," he said. "Here, it's a lot harder to create a career and have a sustainable lifestyle as an artist."

Kinko the clown concurs. The troubles of clowns can serve as a warning to artsand-cutlture-savvy economists.

The recently completed plan noted "a lack of affordable venues and rising rents restrict artists' access to creative spaces." Gentrification and short-term rentals contribute to housing shortages and artist displacement.

"We really want to work on how can we get small-loan access for arts businesses," Criswell said.

He's working on making Ulster County's revolving loan fund accessible to artists and arts communities.

"We're very lucky to live in such a beautiful, natural environment," added Pasti. "And I think that's a big part of our culture, the appreciation for the environment."

Caught between the past and the future, with our ancestors looking out from behind our eyes, through the stories we tell ourselves, new cultures spring from old traditions, maintaining the lure of the Hudson Valley.



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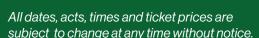




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