HOLIDAY HOT LIST
The 20 shows most worth a visit before New Year’s, from the most in demand to the little treasures around the corner—and those for tiny tots, too
BY EMMET SULLIVAN

The Nutcracker Sweet
The classical and jazz versions of the show duke it out to see who leads the Kingdom of Snow, Music Institute of Chicago, Dec. 8

Hannukatz
A singing cat brings holiday cheer to the Hanukkah-hating children of the Moskowitz family. National Pastime Theatre, Dec. 2 to 31

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey
A boy seeks to replace his late father’s lost Nativity set in this stage adaption of Susan Wojciechowski’s children’s book. Provision Theatre, Nov. 21 to Dec. 23

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
The campy drag take on Rudolph follows a flaming reindeer finding his place—with topical music to boot. Mary’s Attic, Nov. 29 to Dec. 30

The Christmas Schooner
The locally grown musical of a ship carrying Christmas trees across Lake Michigan sails on for a second season at the Mercury. Mercury Theatre, Nov. 23 to Dec. 30

Welcome Yule!
A 145-person chorus covers classic carols and festive arrangements in the show’s 18th year. Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Dec. 14 to Dec. 23

The Santahand Diaries
David Sedaris’s chronicle of his time as Clrmoel, the holiday elf at Macy’s, brings some irreverent Christmas cheer. Theater Wit. Nov. 23 to Dec. 30

Happy Holly-Daze: A Drinking Experience
Make sure to BYOB to this sketch comedy drinking game, courtesy of Corn Productions. Conservatory. Dec. 6 to 29

We Three Lizzas
The About Face Theatre troupe corruption classic Christmas fables in this wicked new musical with a queer bent. Steppenwolf Garage. Nov. 30 to Dec. 23

Season’s Greetings
Celebrate the season with Mario, Chewbacca, Superman, and Spock at this all-holiday (even Festivus) burlesque show. Gorilla Tango. Nov. 23 to Dec. 28

Annoyance Christmas Pageant
The rare safe-for-kids show at Annoyance lampoons the Peanuts gang in this live version of the 1965 feature, Annoyance Theatre. Nov. 30 to Dec. 28

Tidings of Tap
The toe-tapping troupe at Chicago Tap Theatre brings out a beatboxing Nutcracker, an a cappella “Carol of the Bells,” and a sassy “Hava Nagila” in its annual offering. Chicago Tap Theatre, Dec. 14 to 16

Dr. Seuss’s How the Grinch Stole Christmas!
Watching a green-furred Grinch jazz-hand around Whoville will make anyone’s heart grow two sizes. Cadillac Palace Theatre, Dec. 5 to 16

Nut Crackin’ Holiday Revue
The raucous comedy show hits everything from gift exchanges with your disloved boyfriend to couples therapy for Mary and Joseph. Second City, Nov. 22 to Dec. 30

The Chimes
Long before vampires bit their way onto the bestseller list, goblins ruled the literary roost. Dickens’s other Christmas story features the creatures waxing on redemption. Remy Bumppo Theatre at Greenhouse Theater Center. Dec. 15 to 31
EVANSTON DANCE ENSEMBLE
12/7-12/8 Baal Rashid and Christina Ernst revive their adaptation of C. S. Lewis’s book The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. With music by Steve Rashid, this production will be a family-friendly event that does not lack originality. $15–$22. Northwestern University’s Josephine Louis Theater, 20 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847/491-3636.

HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO
12/5-12/9 For its Winter Series, the progressive contemporary troupe premieres Cool Casse, the avant-garde Swedish choreographer Mats Ek’s toasty-turvy commentary on household chores. Dancers partner with vacuum cleaners for performances set to disco, swing, and jazz. Also on the bill: the remount of Arizona Barton’s dramatic, intimate Untouched. $25–$94. Harris Theater, 205 E. Randolph, Hubbardstreetdance.com.

NUTCRACKER ROUNDUP
12/7-12/27 The Joffrey Ballet’s all-American, decadenutcracker is superbly danced. The Chicago Children’s Choir perform in the magical kingdom of snow. $31–$132. Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Parkway. nutcracker.org. 12/8 Salt Creek Ballet takes the artistic high ground without sacrificing cozy family fun. $15–$40. Center for the Performing Arts at Governors State University, 1 University Parkway, centerforart.org. 12/8-12/9 Ruth Page Civic Ballet is a fun, exhilarating show. Select performances combine dancing with a preshow gourmet tea party. $22–$52. ruthpage.org. 12/9 The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs presents a interactive Nutcracker, inviting participants to dress up like their favorite character. Free. Preston Bradley Hall in the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington. chicagoculturalcenter.org.

MUSIC

CLASSICAL, NEW MUSIC, OPERA
BY GRAHAM MEYER

APOLLO CHORUS
12/6 at 3, 12/7-12/6 at 3 Apollo’s Messiah sets itself apart from other Handel pageants by conservative: the choir sings an ever-increasing number of movements by heart—and longevity, having run uninterrupted since the Hayes Administration. That’s Rutherford B. Peck, people. $10–$55. 12/6 North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd. Skokie, 12/6. Harris Theater, 205 E. Randolph. apollocorus.org.

CHAMBER OPERA CHICAGO
12/1-2 at 2 The heartwarming and amusing Christmas opera Amahl and the Night Visitors, the story of a crippled shepherd boy and a visit from the Magi, will be directed by Francis Menotti, the son of Amahl’s composer, Gian Carlo Menotti. $10–$25. Cindy Pitzer Auditorium, Harold Washington Library, 400 S. State. chamberopera.com.

CHANTICLEER
12/4-5 at 7:30 The San Francisco–based all-male a cappella choir Chanticleer, which includes some of the best falsetto singers around, marks its annual Chicago Yuletide visit. $39–$61. Fourth Presbyterian Church, 136 E. Chestnut. cso.org.

CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER

CHICAGO FOLKS OPERETTA
12/8 at 11 and 2, 12/9 at 2 and 5 The specialists in rediscovered operettas reunite Peter and Paul in the Land of Nod, the story of two boys who run away to a magical land, by the Austrian composer Franz Lehar, best known for The Merry Widow. In English, $20–$45. 19th Century Club, 178 Forest, Oak Park. chicagoexpression.org.

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
12/2-5 at 6:30 Call early for scarce tickets to the All-Access Chamber Series. CSO musicians play chamber pieces they’ve selected. This program features Shostakovich, Prokofiev, the 19th-century Russian Milly Bakhirev, and the 20th-century Pole Alexandre Tansman. 12/6-8 at 8, 12/9 at 3 An Elgar overture and Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony bookend the lovely Samuel Barber violin concerto, played by the CSO concertmaster, Robert Chen. $27–$208. 12/8 at 11 a.m. and 12:45 p.m. CSO musicians and the conductor Edwin Outwater present It’s Time to Play, a kid-focused look at symphonies by the likes of Haydn and Beethoven. The CSO promises liberal use of the zoom lens for some instrument extreme close-ups. $6–$87. 12/13, 15 at 8; 12/14 at 1:30; 12/16 at 7:30 Jennifer Koh, the local girl made good, plays two double-violin concertos with her teacher, Jaime Laredo, also J.S. Bach in D minor and the other a Chicago premiere by the CSO composer in residence, Anna Clyne, titled Prince of Clouds. Two more Bach works and Stravinsky’s “Dumbarton Oaks” concerto round it out. The program kicks off at 7:30. $29–$243. 12/14, 21 at 7; 12/15, 22 at 3; 12/16, 23 at 1:30 and 5:30 The Hodgkins and delightful Welcome Yule is conducted by the Chicago Symphony Chorus chorusing master, Dauin Wolfe. 12/19 at 8 A subset of the CSO, including several section principals, plays a suite from Stravinsky’s The Soldier’s Tale and Schubert’s Octet in F Major. $22–$81. 12/20, 22 at 8; 12/21 at 1:30 The Dutch-born conductor Jaap van Zweden, an annual

holiday magic

BROOKFIELD ZOO

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amazing animals, animated light displays, laser light shows,
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