UC SANTA BARBARA

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Home Entertainment

If ever there were a time to think outside the box about how to present entertainment, it's when people are mostly staying inside — or at home, anyway.

With innovation part of its ethos, and a determination to offer up an engaging season even amidst the pandemic, UCSB Arts & Lectures has done just that. The organization this week launches House Calls, a series of 15 intimate, interactive online concerts, conversations and Q&As produced and streamed exclusively for the organization and its audiences.

It all kicks off at 5 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 24, with a performance by bluegrass artist Billy Strings.

"We are incredibly excited to be venturing into new territory with our new virtual series, House Calls," said Celesta Billeci, the Miller McCune executive director of A&L. "We know that right now, people are looking for the kind of high-quality entertainment and educational opportunities that A&L provides, and we know that we could all use a little extra inspiration these days. Although there was a lot of uncertainty when we first started planning the series, it was important for A&L to innovate, not hibernate — now that it's here, we think we've created something pretty special."

Giving a whole new meaning to the idea of front row seats, each 60-minute program — in addition to the performances and discussions — will feature informal talk-back sessions and other elements unique to the streaming format.

Also in the lineup, which runs through January, are musicians Jason Isbell, Nathaniel Rateliff and Rhiannon Giddens; 19th U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, M.D.; Financial Times U.S. Editor Gillian Tett; bestselling author Anne Lamott; comedian Mike Birbiglia and others. All events are free for UCSB students.

“This series is connecting people from all over the world — we have Rhiannon Giddens from her home in Ireland, The Danish String Quartet from Copenhagen, Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason from Nottingham ... and the list goes on,” Billeci said. “Wherever your home might be right now, A&L is here for you — you can even connect with your family and friends in different cities for watch parties. You won’t find these events anywhere else. These events are all being presented for us and for us only, and everyone on the program will participate in a Q&A, so the audience will have a chance to connect directly with the artists and speakers.

“As we like to say, stay home and let A&L come to you!”

In the same vein, A&L has recently launched Tabletop Shakespeare, presenting the complete works of Shakespeare as retold by U.K. theater group Forced Entertainment.

Originally conceived in 2015, six performers create condensed versions of all Shakespeare’s plays, comically and intimately retelling them using everyday objects as stand-ins for the characters on a stage made from a table top. Complete Works has been performed in theaters across the world, but amidst the pandemic the piece finds a unique new life by ‘coming home.’ Rather than a table set against the red drapes of a theater, the objects now find their starting positions on a performer’s kitchen table or desk, as if they’d just been taken down from the surrounding shelves and cupboards.

The second week of Tabletop Shakespeare begins Thursday, Sept. 24, with the complete schedule available here. The performances are free for anyone, anywhere to watch, presented live at 12 p.m. on their scheduled dates. Links to watch past performances on-demand will be coming soon.

Tabletop Shakespeare is “for anyone interested in the endless possibilities of storytelling,” Billeci said. “It’s a perfect fit for our at-home world.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.