

Artpark: performers and artists in a glorious natural setting

By Jennifer Merin

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It has been called "Disneyland for the thinking classes." It is certainly one of New York State's most unusual cultural treasures. It is Artpark, an arts center where performers, fine artists, and artisans gather to show their works in progress and in completion to audiences who wish to surround themselves entirely with natural and man-made beauty.

Artpark, seven miles to the north of the Great Niagara Falls, is in the backyard of this historic town, on 200 acres of beautifully landscaped rolling lawns, natural woodlands, and craggy terraces, along the scenic cliffs of the Niagara escarpment. Each summer a broad program of performances, art workshops, art installations, and craft displays is offered; this year's season runs until Sept. 7.

General admission to the park and all outdoor activities are free; events include storytelling, juggling and clown acts, musical ensembles, children's theater, dance performances, puppet shows, and daily demonstra-

tions of techniques in ceramics, weaving, metal and woodwork, glass, and other materials. Daily schedules are available from information booths inside Artpark entrances.

The centerpiece of the park is a handsome, modern, 2,400-seat theater, built in 1965 at a cost of \$7 million. The theater houses splashy productions of musical comedies, sophisticated operas, spectacular ballets and modern-dance performances, classical and popular music concerts, and a jazz festival.

This year's program includes the performances of the operas "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "I Pagliacci" on August 5 and 7 at 8:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. on August 9. During August and September the Pennsylvania Ballet, José Limón Dance Company, National Ballet of Canada, and Pendleton Dance Festival will occupy the stage.

A special "Beethoven Bash" will be given by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra on August 8, and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra will perform on August 21 and 22. Bluegrass artists Doc Watson and Bill Monroe will give a concert on August 6.

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Tickets to the in-theater events cost between \$4 to \$7. The entire rear wall of the theater's auditorium is removed for evening performances and an additional 1,500 people can be seated on the comfortably sloping lawn. Tickets to the seating lawn cost \$3 per show, or a "grass pass," good for the entire season, is available for \$15.

Artpark's second major structure, ArtEl, is an elevated and partly covered wooden platform on which are situated several enclosed workshops and open performance spaces. Here, the public can observe first-rate artisans working at their various crafts — pottery, weaving, painting silk, jewelry, and printmaking. Special children's sessions offer instructive merriment — a great favorite is face painting; preparations of various types of ethnic cuisine are demonstrated in a small, open kitchen.

Early in the season inventive environmental artists are invited for two- or three-week residencies, during which they construct major art projects at various locations throughout the park. There are usually about 15 artists or artisans in residence at a time. Works remain intact and on display from season to season, as long as they survive New York State's winter weather.

Several structures have withstood the elements and become semipermanent. These include Owen Morrel's fantastic "Omega," an enormous architectural structure that juts into space over the wind-swept gorge of the Niagara River and gives those who climb onto its fragile-looking limbs an odd, thrilling sensation of flight.

Winged and feathered visitors who actually do fly into the park are welcomed by William Schade's whimsical "Condominium Birdhouse," a wonderful six-foot-tall warren of wooden nests. Peter Shelton's "Headroom/Footspace," a bunkerlike sculpture on top of a hill, is an amusing yet solemn visual pun still intact from last year. There is also Siah Armajani's peaceful and meditative environmental piece entitled "Meeting Garden."

Lewiston, situated on the US-Canadian border, 30 miles from Buffalo and 75 miles from Toronto, is an ideal setting for Artpark. This modest, unassuming town (pop. 15,000) is as unself-consciously traditional as Artpark is unpretentiously contemporary.

Artpark's schedule of events, ticket order forms, and a helpful brochure containing information about Lewiston and the surrounding area are available from Artpark, Box 371, Lewiston, N.Y. 14092; (716) 745-3377.