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25 notable Washingtonians pick arts and culture highlights of 2010

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The avalanche of end-of-year culture retrospectives scrambles our circuits, so we asked 25 notable Washingtonians to winnow down the best-of pickings for us. Here are their top picks across arts and culture - everything from fine arts to festivals, movies to movements, hyperlocal to extra-global.

PHIL ADE, Rapper

IN D.C. | *The Sweetlife Festival* that was put on by Sweetgreen in the Dupont area. I performed there but there was also another band - a local alternative rock band - called *U.S. Royalty*, and I really enjoyed their set. It was just a fun time.

ELSEWHERE | Definitely *Leaders 1354* in Chicago. They're a clothing boutique. It's the style of clothing I like to wear: streetwear fashion. But it doesn't stop there. They have a high-class denim selection. They have artsy toys. They also have paintings for sale from various artists. It's a dope spot altogether.

ASHOK BAJAJ, Restaurateur, Rasika and the 701 Club

IN D.C. | *Arena Stage opening night*. The whole theater, the whole experience - it's the best thing to happen to D.C. this year. It's architecturally unique to the city. I think it rivals some of the major theaters I've seen in New York or Chicago. It's awesome.

ELSEWHERE | *Assisi*. I have been to Italy many times before, but this time I had a culture guide who was showing me the differences from one city to another, even in their pasta dishes.

FRED BOLLERER, Director and CEO of the Corcoran Gallery of Art and College of Art and Design

IN D.C. | I just went to *Lou Stovall's show at Addison/Ripley Gallery* and loved it.

ELSEWHERE | A photography show by *Pierre and Alexandra Boulat at the Petit Palais in Paris*. One of the finest shows I have seen hung and lit.

BY THE WAY | The best book I read this year was "*Cutting for Stone*" by *Abraham Verghese*. That was marvelous. My wife and I accidentally have become immersed in the African community. Part of us was connecting our relationships with our Ethiopian friends and that book and that doctor.

RITA BRAVER, Correspondent for "CBS Sunday Morning"

IN D.C. | The *Carole King and James Taylor concert* at the Verizon Center. What I thought was amazing was they were somehow able to get the intimacy of the Troubadour. That was a magical evening.

ELSEWHERE | In New York I saw *Valerie Harper in "Tallulah"*. She was so strong.

BY THE WAY | "*The Kids Are All Right*," with Annette Bening and Julianne Moore. It was just really great to see them together at the top of their game.

JUANITA BRITTON, Owner, Anacostia Art Gallery

IN D.C. | I've attended *the Adams Morgan Day Festival* for over 25 years, and something was uniquely different about this year's festival, because it had a tinge of political excitement. Aside from all the wonderful vendors and food and wide variety of attendees, you had the Fenty people and the Vince Gray people, and they had bullhorns, they were dressed in green and blue and white, and they went back and forth with each other in a really healthy political way in this culturally mixed city.

ELSEWHERE | *The North Sea Jazz Festival* [held in Curacao this year] was awesome. You think of the North Sea and you don't know that it's going to be hip. It was just beautiful, celebrating with a lot of different people. So unique.

JULIANNE BRIENZA, Executive director, Capital Fringe Festival

IN D.C. | *The banning of "A Fire in My Belly"* at the National Portrait Gallery both fascinates me and terrifies me. The whole idea of censorship of art seems pre-Internet. . . . So the Portrait Gallery had to take it down . . . but many many more people all over the world have seen this video, and read about this exhibit [as a result], and probably thought how far we have come since the '80s in regards to HIV/AIDS and GLBT art.

ELSEWHERE | *The Pike Place Market in Seattle*. The architecture of the market is unique - most of the buildings are historic landmarks. The food is fresh and inexpensive, the fresh-cut flowers are so beautiful and so inexpensive. Also there are buskers there every day, playing the guitar and singing.

DEREK BROWN, Bartender, the Columbia Room

IN D.C. | *"Candide" at the Shakespeare Theatre* . . . perhaps the most apt telling of the national political narrative as well as a poppy, catchy and glittery performance. The tragic unfolding of events in Candide's life mirror only too well the fall from idealism of the Obama campaign, something that the denizens of D.C. understand too well. Faced by war, poverty and the disingenuous plans of others, Candide's "best of all possible worlds" caught the "Yes We Can" vibe precisely and then watched it dismantled by realpolitik, even as the rhetoric hung like a staid banner.

PEGGY COOPER CAFRITZ, Art collector and co-founder of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts

IN D.C. | The *lecture by J.W. Mahoney illuminating "Catalyst,"* the exhibition at the Katzen Center, which was a survey of the history of contemporary art in Washington. It really made me think about the inclusion and exclusion of this artist and that artist in Washington over the last 40 years. And it was a joy to see Ed McGowan's recent works.

ELSEWHERE | In South Africa, the show at *the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town* introduced me to some new artists but also included young African American artists such as Rashid Umar. I think next year is going to be an amazing breakout year for him.

BY THE WAY | And I saw other artists; *Simone Leigh in Miami* - she does the most beautiful ceramic sculptures; *Abigail Deville at the Bronx Museum*; and *Alexis Peskine*, who is half black, half Russian, and he works with acrylic, enamel and nails.

RAHEEM DEVAUGHN, R&B singer

IN D.C. | *Ben's Next Door*, the restaurant right next to Ben's Chili Bowl. Knowing the legacy and the years they put into Ben's and to see it cultivated from that to next door - it already feels like a spot that's going to be around for the next 50 years. It always makes a brother feel at home. I'm there at least two or three times a month.

WILL EASTMAN, DJ and music producer

IN D.C. | *Moombahton*, which is a new musical genre that merges electrohouse and reggaeton. It was invented this spring by Dave Nada, who was a D.C.-based DJ. He just moved to L.A. a month ago and it's really, I feel, hit a nerve in the dance music community. Everything was really hyper in 2009 and 2010, with electrohouse being 128 to 130 beats per minute. What Dave did was slow it down to 104-to-110 bpm range and made it really sexy. He added this Latin element, which makes it have a lot of swag. It's a powerful, sexy feel on the dance floor.

BY THE WAY | *Twitter* really blew up in 2010. I've had an account for years but I didn't really use it very heavily, and then this year I've fallen in love with it. It's a really great way to communicate all over.

CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH, Music director, National Symphony Orchestra

ELSEWHERE | The appearance of *the Kirov Ballet and Mariinsky Theatre of St. Petersburg* for two evenings of Rodion Shchedrin's work, his first ballet and his most recent opera, [in Paris at the Theatre du Chatelet]. And it was especially striking to meet and talk in great length with Shchedrin's wife, Maya Plisetskaya, the greatest ballerina after Anna Pavlova - a living legend!

SUZANNE FARRELL, Founder, Suzanne Farrell Ballet

IN D.C. | *Tyne Daly* in "Master Class," as well as the performances of the *Trocadero Ballet*.

PHILIPPA HUGHES, Arts maven, the Pink Line Project

IN D.C. | *Spleen* was my favorite art exhibit/experience of the year. It was by three young women who've just finished their MFAs. When I saw this installation, I was so amazed they were able to take this vision they had, this apocalyptic idea about our society, and create it in this ridiculous space - in the basement of this new condo building at 12th and U. It was really bold.

ELSEWHERE | I saw *the Murakami exhibit in Versailles* and it was really mind-blowing. I'd heard that lots of people were up in arms for putting his art into this extremely ornate, gilded, traditional setting, but it just weirdly worked. It was a huge contrast: contemporary versus the Louis XIV froufrou look.

MICHAEL KAHN, Artistic director, the Shakespeare Theatre

IN D.C. | Absolute favorite was *the Chekhov International Theatre Festival*, with "Twelfth Night," directed by Declan Donnellan at the Kennedy Center. Also enjoyed "*Clybourne Park*" at Woolly, *Caetano Veloso* at Lisner Auditorium and the much talked about "*Hide/Seek*" exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery.

ELSEWHERE | *Mark Rylance's performance in "La Bete"* on Broadway.

MICHAEL KAISER, President, the Kennedy Center

ELSEWHERE | American Ballet Theatre's performance of "*Don Quixote*" in New York. Natalia Osipova is a world-class dancer worth traveling to see.

BY THE WAY | The publication of "*Finishing the Hat*" by Stephen Sondheim. The book is a graduate course in the art of lyric writing, written by Broadway's greatest lyricist. Sondheim proves as adept a teacher as he is an artist.

DOROTHY KOSINSKI, Director, the Phillips Collection

IN D.C. | My favorite play was "*Permanent Collection*" at the *Round House Theatre*, and the best exhibition was "*Yves Klein: With the Void, Full Powers*" at the *Hirshhorn*.

ELSEWHERE | "*Red*" on Broadway, and an exhibition of *Nicolas de Stael at Fondation Gianadda* in Martigny, Switzerland.

BY THE WAY | Best film was "*Inception*."

CATHY LANIER, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department

IN D.C. | I can't remember the last time I saw a movie or a play. I don't have time to watch TV or movies.

BY THE WAY | I read one book this year and loved it. "*When Brute Force Fails: How to Have Less Crime and Less Punishment*" by Mark A.R. Kleiman. I shared it with my criminal justice partners.

MARSTON LUCE, Owner, Marston Luce Antiques

IN D.C. | I went to see "*Oklahoma!*" at *Arena Stage* and I thought it was fantastic. It was the most wonderful thing I had ever seen.

ELSEWHERE | I saw *the Flamenco Festival in Biarritz*. Wild colorful dancing in the street.

HUGO MEDRANO, Artistic director, GALA Hispanic Theatre

BY THE WAY | I read the three books of amazing Swedish author *Stieg Larsson* and I liked very much how he parallels Swedish society with America. . . . The main female character is fascinating. Not only how she dominates computers but also because her independence as a woman is incredible. She's like a feminist times 10.

DAVID MUSE, Artistic director, Studio Theatre

IN D.C. | The best theater I saw in D.C. was "*Clybourne Park*" at Woolly Mammoth and "*The Liar*" at Shakespeare Theatre. The best music I heard in D.C. was *Stew at the Iota* in Arlington, an intimate concert for an audience of 30 people.

ELSEWHERE | In New York, the best theater was "*Red*" by John Logan and "*The Aliens*" by Annie Baker.

ARI ROTH, Artistic director, Theater J

IN D.C. | My favorite was the longest: The Tricycle Theatre's "*Afghanistan: The Great Game*" [at Sidney Harman Hall]. I brought 25 students on a Sunday to all three parts. I love me a marathon, especially where you learn a ton about history and engage in some of the most important foreign policy matters of our moment. . . . The best concert was *Lucy Kaplansky* at the Barns at Wolf Trap. It's the 10th time I've seen her - I used to sing with her in high school - and I never before would list her as a favorite concertgoing experience, because I've been so close to her. But damn it if her stage performance and song catalogue haven't grown better and her songs grown deeper and her act so much more confident.

ELSEWHERE | I loved "*Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*," closing too soon on Broadway. A totally irreverent, Wild West rock musical about the founding of the modern Democratic Party.

BY THE WAY | The best film was "*The Social Network*." I was exhilarated by every aspect of it, including the thrill of seeing young people create something new and transformational. The movie has apparently played fast and loose with the truth. And so what else is new?

ERIC SCHAEFFER, Artistic director, Signature Theatre

IN D.C. | The Lady Gaga concert [at Verizon Center]. It was amazing just seeing how the crowd reacted to her theatricality.

ELSEWHERE | I was really moved by "*War Horse*" in London. Am glad it will be coming to Broadway this spring.

HOWARD SHALWITZ, Artistic director, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company

IN D.C. | It was hard to top *the Joan Baez concert* at Strathmore. I went expecting a nostalgia trip, but was totally surprised by the emotional wallop.

ELSEWHERE | I had the good fortune of attending the *Varna International Theatre Festival in Bulgaria*. The most amazing play was "The Apocalypse Comes at 6PM" - an abstract interweaving of urban relationships in a city with a killer on the loose.

BY THE WAY | I'm currently reading "*The Fervent Years*" by Harold Clurman, his riveting history of the Group Theatre. I can't believe I've never read it before! Essential reading for any theater lover.

NIGEL SHEINWALD, British ambassador to the United States

IN D.C. | I thought the best film of the year was "*The Secret in Their Eyes*," which unsurprisingly won the foreign Oscar. A compelling mixture of suspense, history and romance.

ELSEWHERE | The cultural highlight was [my wife's and my] first visit to New Mexico. I'd single out visiting *Georgia O'Keeffe's house at Abiquiu* and the pottery of the Indian Pueblos.

CHRIS WALLACE, Host of "Fox News Sunday"

IN D.C. | I could prattle on about a museum exhibition or concert I attended, but the most exciting "event" I went to this year was *Stephen Strasburg's debut* in June for the Washington Nationals. He struck out 14 - the sellout crowd was into every pitch - and there was a thrilling sense of how a prodigy can electrify a community.

BY THE WAY | I love going to movies. My favorite this year was "*Black Swan*." It is a wonderful mix of art house/horror film. And with so much in movies and television playing "by the numbers," I never knew what was going to happen next.

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