

# Lighting Up the Holidays, 2020 Style

By **Dan Aubrey** - December 2, 2020

This shaken up year is getting an equally shaken schedule of presentations to help us celebrate one of the most unusual holiday seasons in recent history.

Ranging from the very old fashioned to the very newest of technology and presented in physical space or digitally remote, the following events are designed to keep something in all of us bright with hope during a very troublesome year.

Heading this year's list is a regional holiday tradition that never goes out of fashion.



*Howell Farm's Christmas on the Farm.*

Howell Farm's Christmas on the Farm is set for Saturday, December 5, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The annual free event at one of the area's treasures features bell-decked horses, tree cuttings and decorations, and a visit from Santa, all on this living history farm located in a hilly valley near the Delaware River.

Of course, this year will also feature social distancing as organizers say the event adheres to State of New Jersey guidelines for public events. That includes visitors being required to carry masks at all times and wear them when social distancing is not possible.

Nevertheless this holiday visit to a farm stirs memories of old New Jersey — and can create new ones.

Howell Farm is located at 101 Hunter Road, Titusville. 609-737-3299 or [www.howellfarm.org](http://www.howellfarm.org).

Here are some other area events happening in actual space and time:

Morven Museum & Garden's Festival of Trees is on view in the historic Princeton home through January 10.

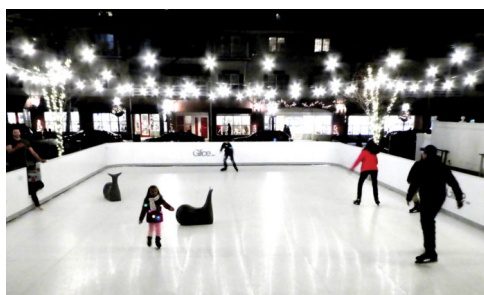
The annual event is a juried collection of trees and mantels decorated by area garden clubs and nonprofit partners displayed in the museum's galleries throughout the mansion-turned-museum.

It's also a good way to connect to one of the region's most historic buildings – the home of Declaration of Independence signer Richard Stockton and the target of British vengeance during the January 3, 1777, Battle of Princeton.

Morven Museum & Garden, 55 Stockton Street, Princeton, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Festival of Trees included with Museum admission of \$10; \$8 for seniors; free for friends of Morven and children 6 and under.

For additional information and associated Festival of Trees programming, both virtual and in-person, visit [www.morven.org](http://www.morven.org).

Skating On The Square – Palmer Square, that is – is back through February 27.



*The ice rink at Palmer Square.*

The outdoor synthetic skating rink that takes up a pool-sized area is located on Hulfish Street, right behind the Nassau Inn. Perfect for little ones, its general hours are Thursdays and Fridays, 4 to 7 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 3 p.m. and 4 to 7 p.m. But look out for holiday hours: December 21 through 23, noon to 3 p.m. and closed on Christmas.

Admission per person is \$10 cash or \$12 credit card. While skates are included in the fee, skaters are welcome to bring their own. Masks and social distancing are required. For more information, visit [www.palmersquare.com/holidays](http://www.palmersquare.com/holidays).

Hamilton Township's annual Winter Wonderland continues this year with some pandemic-caused modifications. Organizers are calling it "Hamilton's Holidays in the Park" and invite visitors to take in the annual decorations, lights, and music that light up Kuser Farm Park by either walking through the park on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, December 4, 5, and 6, or participating in evening drive-throughs set from December 6 to January 1. For more details, visit [www.hamiltonnj.com](http://www.hamiltonnj.com).

## Theater

McCarter Theatre in Princeton added a new twist to home theater this year when it created a way to allow theater patrons disappointed by the pandemic-related closure of the annual "A Christmas Carol" to bring Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, and a host of ghosts home for the holidays with "A Christmas Carol @HOME."

McCarter staff calls it "a curated box to create your own version of Dickens' classic. Inside are individually wrapped envelopes with scenes that can be performed in person (or over Zoom), character sketch postcards to paint, color, send or frame – and 'conversation cards' to spark discussion around the story's timeless themes and connect them with our current moment."

Boxes cost \$40 each with a \$5 handling fee and must order by December 7 (or while supplies last) to ensure delivery by December 24. More details can be found at [www.mccarter.org](http://www.mccarter.org).

George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick and Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope are presenting a new streaming version of "A Christmas Carol."

Developed by Broadway producer Hunter Arnold ("Kinky Boots") and his innovative live streaming company On The Stage and La Jolla Playhouse, the production features Tony Award-winning actor Jefferson Mays, who plays more than 50 roles in what producers call a "virtuosic, master class of a performance."

The production is available through January 3 through either George Street or Bucks County websites. Tickets are \$50 (additional fees and taxes also apply). A percentage of the price goes to support the theater offering it through their

websites: [www.bcptheater.org](http://www.bcptheater.org) or  
[www.georgestreetplayhouse.org](http://www.georgestreetplayhouse.org).

Actors' NET Theater in Morrisville, now in its 25th season, is premiering an online video presentation of "Dear Brutus," a mid-summer's night fantasy by "Peter Pan" creator J.M. Barrie.

Adapted for digital media by company members Maryalice Rubins-Topoleski (director) and Charlotte Kirkby (narrator), press materials say the play "combines the technology of Zoom for socially distanced interior scenes, with exterior scenes filmed in a local woodland under strict adherence to safe distance standards."

The cast of regional performers is Ken Ammerman, Cheryl Doyle, Joe Doyle, Matt Duchnowski, Mary Kierst, Charlotte Kirkby, Michael Krahel, Nyiema Lunsford, Cat Miller, Nicholas Pecht, and Maryalice Rubins-Topoleski.

For the schedule of free performances  
[www.actorsnetbucks.org](http://www.actorsnetbucks.org).

Music Mountain Theater, the community theater in Lambertville, has two holiday offerings.

The first is an in-theater presentation of "Fruitcake," a dark comedy look at the life behind the scenes of a crisis hotline on Christmas Eve. Originally created by the French theater collective Le Splendid, the play was adapted by co-artistic director Louis Palena.

The show — produced with seats blocked off to accommodate social distancing yet allowing family and friends to sit together — runs Fridays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays at 3 p.m., from December 4 through 13. Friday night presentations will also be streamed. Tickets are \$25.

Music Mountain has also created a streaming production. "Frosty the Snowman," promoted as an MMT Film Original, is a musical written and composed by Palena and filmed by Morrisville filmmaker Damian Bartolacci. The story involves a group of children who try to preserve a living snowman by taking him to the North Pole. Streaming is now available and continues through January 1. Tickets are \$25 and include multi-viewings.

Music Mountain Theatre, 1483 Route 179, Lambertville. 609-397-3337 or [www.musicmountaintheatre.org](http://www.musicmountaintheatre.org).

## Dance



*Roxey Ballet offers a made-for-TV Nutcracker.*

The Roxey Ballet, a professional dance company in Lambertville, presents its annual version of “The Nutcracker” in a made-for-television film available for viewing through the company’s “Nutcracker Channel” through January 1.

This new production, directed by company co-founder Mark Roxey, features more than 200 hand-made costumes designed by Alicia Worden and Ana Vichnevetsk – including new personalized costume masks for each role. The performers are a combination of professionals from around the world and young performers from Lambertville, New Hope, Hopewell, Pennington, Ewing, and Princeton.

Channel subscribers also receive live-streamed rehearsals, cast and crew interviews, the Sugar Plum Fairy Adventure Series, a Senior Living Dance Class, and an additional production of The Year of the Women Choreography Lab featuring five New Jersey-based choreographers creating socially conscious works showcasing women’s issues: disability rights, women’s health initiatives, bullying, and the cultural condition.

Subscriptions cost \$99.99 and are good to January 1. For more information, go to [www.roxeyballet.org/virtual-performances](http://www.roxeyballet.org/virtual-performances).

## Music

Princeton Symphony Orchestra is presenting its annual “Holiday POPS!” in a virtual format for free.

The festive event, available weekends from December 5 through 20, features holiday favorites performed by pianists

Christina and Michelle Naughton, dancers of the American Repertory Ballet, and PSO musicians led by music director Rossen Milanov. Also appearing are members of the Princeton High School Choir under the direction of Vincent Metallo.

The program includes selections from Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker," holiday favorites played by the PSO woodwind quintet, and Leroy Anderson's "Sleigh Ride" recorded by the PSO brass ensemble in Princeton's Palmer Square. The Princeton High School Choir performs Eric Whitacre's "Sing Gently," and a piano trio including PSO concertmaster Basia Danilow accompanies American Repertory Ballet dancers Nanako Yamamoto and Jonathan Montepara, as they perform "The Nutcracker's" grand pas de deux.

Access to the Holiday POPS! virtual concert is free with registration available for specific time slots of 2, 4, and 7 p.m. on select dates.

A digital program book will be available in advance to enhance the audience experience. For broadcast access: 609-497-0020 or [www.princetonsymphony.org](http://www.princetonsymphony.org).



*The Capital Singers of Trenton.*

The Capital Singers of Trenton will present a virtual version of its annual "Winter Songs" concerts on Sunday, December 6, at 4 p.m. The 14th installment of a Lessons and Carols-styled holiday event features classic songs and works by choral composers Arvo Part and David Willcocks.

Vinroy D. Brown conducts, and guests include the Trenton Children's Chorus Training Choir and singer, composer, and reverend William N. Heard of Kaighn Avenue Baptist Church of Camden. Tickets are \$10. [www.capitalsingers.org/home](http://www.capitalsingers.org/home)



*Westminster's choir.*

Westminster Choir College presents the digital “Holidays with Westminster” on Saturday, December 12, at 8 p.m. The presentation includes the Westminster Chapel Choir, Westminster Concert Bell Choir, the Jubilee Singers, Westminster Kantorei, Westminster Symphonic Choir, and Westminster Williamson Voices Treble Ensemble.

Free online viewing begins Saturday, December 12, at 8 p.m. with the concert available for viewing through the holiday season. For more information or link onto the concert, visit [www.rider.edu/about/events/holidays-westminster](http://www.rider.edu/about/events/holidays-westminster).

## History

The annual Revolutionary War recreations of the historically important battles waged in the region have been canceled because of the large number of people they involve and attract.

Missing in action this year is the popular Washington Crossing on Christmas Day and its mid-December public dress rehearsal. As crossing organizers noted, “Out of concern for public safety and due to Department of Conservation and Natural Resources’ crowd-size restrictions related to COVID-19, the two public Delaware River crossing reenactments will not be held in December at Washington Crossing Historic Park.

“Because the reenactments require months of planning and coordination among hundreds of reenactors, park staff members, and volunteers, a decision had to be made well in advance. We are as disappointed as you are that this much-loved annual event cannot be held in the usual manner this year.

“However, to keep the tradition alive, we will debut a special pre-recorded crossing video on Christmas Day. You can tune in this video on the park’s Facebook page or YouTube. Please stay tuned for more details.”

The Trent House Association will present the Practitioners of Musick in a virtual performance honoring the Scottish heritage of Trenton’s namesake, William Trent. The concert accents the Battle of Trenton by focusing on the music that George Washington and his family enjoyed. The program is set for Saturday, December 26, at 1 p.m.. and can be viewed via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/39mqPK9>. Suggested donations of \$10 can be made at [www.williamtrenthouse.org/donation.html](http://www.williamtrenthouse.org/donation.html).

### Facebook Comments

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**Dan Aubrey**