

# Arts Venues: Doors Are Open, Masks Are On

By **Dan Aubrey** - May 19, 2021

To go or not to go? That is the question many of us are asking as we contemplate visiting some of the area's cultural venues. And while the spirit to go is there, there is the very real concern regarding personal safety going out and about during the current pandemic, even as more and more people are getting vaccinated – and recent CDC guidance indicates that the vaccinated can go maskless in most situations. So how safe and easy is for someone to go to the area's museums and exhibition centers at this time?

Three time reserved visits tell the story.

## Grounds For Sculpture



*Grounds For Sculpture has reopened its indoor exhibit spaces with a retrospective of works by American sculptor Bruce Beasley.*

I initially experienced some difficulty with online entry. I was told there were tickets for a time, but when I went to the link to reserve, I was told it was already filled. I was willing to say that I was klutzy, but there seemed to be inconsistency of information. One page listed all the times available, then another had me look for times.

Nevertheless, after some perseverance I was set and got an email confirmation for my timed entry.

I drove up to the gate box at the entrance and saw signs instructing me to put on my mask and be prepared to use it in the buildings and outside if social distancing was difficult. The attendant asked me for my scheduled time and name. She confirmed it, opened the gate, and instructed me where to park – the opposite side of the main visitors' center – and verbally informed me about mask and social distancing.

As I walked from the car I saw signs encouraging people to put masks on by asking them to take a mask selfie and share it.

When I entered the building I was uncertain where to go. In the past there was a queue that led to the ticket and membership desk to get a wristband to show payment. I spotted and followed a path of stanchions and ropes, only to find that it led to the restrooms.

Confused, I retraced my steps and realized that in order to get to the grounds I didn't need to stop at the desk but just go through the doors opposite of those I entered.

As I moved into the formal grounds, I came across signs that asked visitors to wear masks and not to touch the sculptures or signage, a health concern practice that turns over GFS's longstanding invitation to touch the work.

During a visit to the Museum Building to see the featured exhibition – a retrospective of American sculptor Bruce Beasley – a guard greeted me and other visitors by welcoming us, thanking us for wearing masks into the building, asking us to refrain from touching objects and signage, and instructing how to move through a portion of the exhibition.

After my bumpy start, I was feeling more comfortable and safe. With the timed scheduling, the park wasn't overcrowded, providing a good atmosphere for maintaining social distancing.

Grounds For Sculpture, 80 Sculptors Way, Hamilton. Monday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Timed entry reservations required, \$10.

[www.groundsforsculpture.org](http://www.groundsforsculpture.org).

## **Trenton City Museum**



*Timed entry and temperature checks are used at the Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie.*

Also known as Ellarslie, the historic John Notman-designed mansion in Cadwalader Park, the TCM has been operating on timed visits for the past several months.

While the museum was experiencing a website-related glitch when I set up a visit, it got worked out and it was pretty easy.

The fixed times are to assure that there are no more than 25 people in the space at a time. And although I was the only one who showed up for that time, the timed entrances help the museum staff monitor visitor attendance and gauge occupancy.

Unlike Grounds For Sculpture, the TCM will allow entrance to visitors who show up without a reservation.

When I arrived I followed the small signs that guided me around a closed section of the park and into the area in front of the mansion that houses the museum. Parking and the walk to the museum were simple.

When I entered I was greeted by a masked museum member who used an electric thermometer to take my temperature and informed me that social distancing and masks were required — and had extra ones on hand. The distancing point was reinforced by signs noting how many people could be in the room at one time and to keep six feet away from one another.

The midday Friday appointment seems an optimum time to have the galleries alone and easily view the current exhibition, “Women Artists, Trenton Style,” curated by nationally known Trenton artist Mel Leipzig and on view through June 6.

Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie, Cadwalader Park, Trenton.  
 Friday and Saturday, noon to 4 p.m., Sunday 1 to 4 p.m. Timed  
 entry reservations available. Free. 609-989-3632 or  
[www.ellarslie.org](http://www.ellarslie.org).

## Morven Museum and Garden



*Morven limits capacity on each level of its two-story indoor museum.*

Morven Museum and Garden has also been using timed entrance for the past several months and has a good and easy site to select times – including those with docent tours.

They also clearly show they are adhering to pandemic-related health practices. Signage for masks and six-foot social distancing are visible, and no more than 12 visitors per floor are allowed at one time in the two-story building.

I showed up and followed the signs directing me to the gift shop to pick up tickets. There I encountered a masked Morven representative behind a Plexiglass screen who checked my name and directed me to the main building, where another masked museum rep behind plexiglass checked me in, listed the museum protocols regarding keeping masks on and not touching objects, and introduced me to the masked docent assigned to lead the 2 p.m. tour.

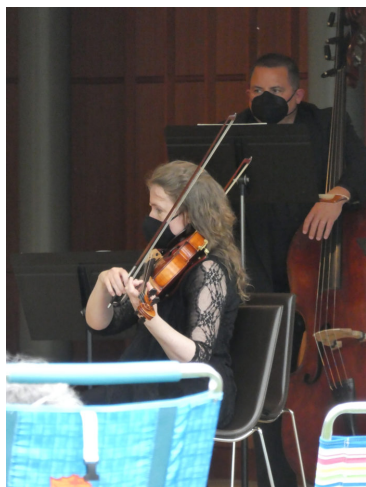
Again I was the only one there and got a tour of Morven's permanent first floor history of the home by enthusiastic guide Mollie Brod and then self-toured the second floor art exhibition, "In Nature's Realm: The Art of Gerard Rutgers Hardenbergh," the 19th century self-taught wildlife painter. It's on view into 2022.

As I left, Morven's attention to health was re-enforced with one of the museum staff members wiping the handrails.

Morven Museum, 55 Stockton Street, Princeton. Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Timed entry reservations required. \$8 to \$10. 609-924-8144 or [www.morven.org](http://www.morven.org).

So the area museums were pretty on top of it, but what about group venues – such as concerts?

The Princeton Symphony Orchestra at Morven's first spring concert was the test.



*A masked musician performs from the open doors of Morven's education center.*

Ordering tickets was easy, and I was instructed to show up before 6 p.m., be prepared for outdoor presentation, wear a mask, and practice social distancing.

As my wife and I drove up the Morven driveway, a PSO representative standing next to an orchestra sign placed at the walkway leading to the reception desk and performing area waved us on to the parking area and remained in place to make sure visitors were clear about where to go.

Once the reservations were confirmed, a PSO rep led us to one of the 51 pods – six feet by six feet or so lawn areas boxed off by tape and appropriately distanced from one another. They were arranged in front of the glass façade of Morven's educational building that, with its series of double doors open, ably served as a makeshift stage. Reservations clearly noted that attendees should bring chairs or blankets.

The program featured the PSO conductor Rossen Milanov leading a string musicians in works including Tchaikovsky's "Serenade in C."



*Seats for the PSO's outdoor concert are BYO, arranged in distanced pods.*

And while the sound did not resonate as it would from a space designed for a full orchestra (and sometimes was punctuated by the addition of a bird singing or plane flying over), it did the trick, engaged a pandemic starved audience hungry for a live music, got musicians back to work, and actually was creating history.

I can't help but think that decades from now someone will be telling visitors that during the pandemic of 2020-2021 masked audiences sat outside the building while a masked orchestra performed within and let the music out the doors.

You can find more on the PSO's outdoor season at [www.princetonsymphony.org](http://www.princetonsymphony.org) and enjoy a seemingly safe outing — and be part of an historic moment.

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