

SAN DIEGO
Reader

A
YARD SALE
FOR
BACKYARD RENAISSANCE

Theater company funds the future by selling the past PAGE 2

The happy-making
jacket from "Misery".
(Photo by: Matthew Lickona)

Nine concerts to see this September (that aren't already sold out) PAGE 4

A YARD SALE FOR BACKYARD RENAISSANCE

Theater company funds the future by selling the past

By Matthew Lickona
SAN DIEGO READER

Six-fifteen on a Saturday morning is a ridiculous hour for theater people. But you know what they say: the show must go on. Or in this case, the sale. And so a crowd has gathered here in San Carlos for the Much Ado About Knick-Knacks Yard Sale, a combination storage purge/fundraiser for Backyard Renaissance Theatre Company, which uses Downtown's Tenth Avenue Arts Center to stage its "art to the gut." (Of late, they've been taking some big swings at marriages gone soft in the middle.) Because as every good yard saler knows, if you want the good stuff, you have to get there early.

And there is good stuff here. The books piled under the end table of an associate professor of history in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" The handbag and luggage of a woman who's always depended upon the kindness of strangers in "A Streetcar Named Desire." A collection of antique cameras that were supposed to serve as a lobby display for a production of "I Am a Camera," the play behind the musical "Cabaret." All up for grabs — orphaned objects that Backyard Renaissance hopes will find a home.

And of course, the sort of clothes you require to transport the audience to a different time and place every time. Shopper Tuscany has no trouble outfitting herself for next year's Renn Faire in Riverside: flouncy skirts, frilly tops, a faux fur jacket that might serve as a duchess' capelet. A costumer from Palomar College finds a fluffy, curly squirrel tail and a fitted red silk dress. "We're doing 'The Spongebob

Musical' soon," she explains. "My costume designer isn't keen on the big tail for Sandy Cheeks, just because there's multiple scenes where she's standing close to other people or climbing things. But I'm going to push for the big tail." As for the dress, "right now, I'm costuming 'Clue.'" It would be dynamite on Miss Scarlet. "But it doesn't seem terribly forgiving." She measures the bust, tugs at the cups, consults a card containing her cast's measurements, and examines the back of the dress, searching for ways to make room.

"We're always looking for a way to engage with the people who come to our shows and support our company," says Francis Gercke, co-founder and artistic director of Backyard Renaissance — a position that requires him to think about the "business" part of "show business." "We like to do things that are a little more personal than what's normally done." Hence the promo flyer's invitation: "Come rummage through 11 years of theatrical history and take home a piece of the show." And maybe pick up a story to take home along with it. Gercke's got a million of 'em.

"Moving sucks," says Gercke. "I am a hoarder. Everything has this deeply personal story for me. But this was still fun for Jess and me." That would be Jessica John Gercke, co-founder and executive director of the company. For example: "There's this great pair of shorts that Mike Sears wore for our first-ever show, Parlour Song." His character, Ned, is written as being rotund. Sears was...not. To drive the mismatch home, "Jessica specifically got him shorts that didn't fit particularly well and weren't particularly stylish. As weird and creepy as it sounds, I hope nobody takes those



A lucky lady made off with Blanche's baggage — the physical kind, anyway.
(Photo by Michael Mackie, courtesy of Backyard Renaissance)

shorts, because they are the ultimate red badge of courage for me — that an actor put them on and performed a full run of shows in them." (For his bravery, Sears was awarded the Craig Noel Award for Outstanding Featured Performance in a Play.)

A gold futon brought back memories of "Mr. and Mrs. Fitch" staged at Moxie Theatre on El Cajon Boulevard. "We had to get out old production photos to figure out what production it was from, and it ended up occupying two hours of a Friday morning. Eventually, we said, 'We can't be doing this. We have to let the kids grow up and move out.'"

"I hope this isn't a retirement-type thing," says one shopper.

"Oh no, it's because they're expanding," comes the quick response from another. "They have to get rid of the old to make room for the new."

"By nature, theater is an inefficient model," affirms Gercke. "It's just not conducive to streamlining. We have this bedding we used for 'Misery' — a full set, with quilts and pillowcases. But not every play calls for a bed" — and even if it did, "you don't want people staring at the same furniture for three years in a row. Companies have to reinvent the wheel every time out. We had a period refrigerator for 'Smokefall,' and we were thinking about using it for 'A Streetcar Named Desire.' But we stumbled; we started worrying, 'Is it going to look like the same refrigerator? We've got to get a different fridge.' And that's how you start to acquire stuff."

Right now, the company is renting three storage spaces, "and costs have really gone

up in the last year. We realized that if we could get rid of those three storage spaces, we could actually come close to affording a monthly lease on a property, so that we would have a commercial residency. It's not like we could afford a theater, but we could combine storage space, rehearsal space, and have the potential for a small cabaret space. It would be a better use of the contributions people provide." A framed flyer lays out the average production costs for a Backyard Renaissance show — \$46,720 — and breaks it down: \$9500 for actors, \$12,500 for required crew, \$4500 for additional crew, \$7700 for theater space (including storage), \$7900 for production and \$4620 for marketing.

The sale will eventually make about \$2000. In addition, says Jessica in the aftermath, "It helped us clear out a \$400 a month storage space, which is a savings of \$4800 over the next year. So it gives us close to \$7000 to put towards rent on a new rehearsal/storage space. Also, it was really fun to see a number of friends from other theater groups come out, and also to meet some longtime audience members!" Friends like Witchland writer Tim Mulligan, or Teri Brown, who spent 15 years as artistic director down at Chula Vista's OnStage Playhouse (where she staged the first San Diego production of "Heathers: The Musical").

Brown has a particular reason for being here: she's curious about a costume. "One of Jess's big loves is wardrobe," says Gercke. "Finding pieces that not only look good, but feel like the character has lived in them. That they purchased it themselves, and it shows them off in a good light even as it tells the story."



For sale: used jacket, slightly stained, some wear and tear in back.
(Photo by Michael Mackie, courtesy of Backyard Renaissance)

But not every actor is supposed to look good. Sometimes, they need to look terrible. “We have the jacket that the sheriff wears in ‘Misery,’” says Gercke. “He was played by Alex Guzman, and he gets shot with a shotgun by Maggie Carney’s character. Our special effects coordinator Jeffery Neitzel blew out the back of the jacket and had blood and guts hanging from it. The spine was even showing. I couldn’t believe he was going to rip it up, and then once he completed it, it was like this work of art. But I said to him, ‘You’ve really screwed Jess and me, because we’re never going to get rid of this jacket. Who walks around with their spine out?’”

How about another sheriff from another production of “Misery” — like the one Lamplighters in La Mesa will be doing in October, with Brown in the role of Annie Wilkes? Incidentally, Lamplighters is facing its own real-estate issues: “It’s the oldest community theater in San Diego,” notes Brown. “They were down by the library in La Mesa, and then when the police station decided to expand, they didn’t have a home for three years. They found a place in a shopping center, but the guy who owned it passed away, and the school that’s there now wants the whole thing.”

Despite the ground shifting beneath Lamplighters’ feet, it’s something of a return-and-restart for Brown. “It’s the first place where I came in as an actor, right out of high school. I haven’t been on stage for

many years, but this year, my goal was, ‘I’m gonna start auditioning again,’” after years of grieving for her lost partner. “On a whim, I auditioned for ‘The Rise and Fall of Little Voice’ at Backyard this year. And I was cast. And then ‘Misery’ came up” — the kind of lead she hasn’t tackled in ages. “It’s big. But I was like, ‘Okay, yes, I can do that.’”

Brown was already a fan of Stephen King, and also of tackling tough stuff. “I directed ‘Carrie’ down at OnStage. I like to give myself a challenge with every show that I direct. And that one was, ‘How do you deal with all this blood?’ We had a platform that had steps, almost like bleachers. And at the top of the platform was a grate, and under the grate was a rolling sort of bucket thing that you could take out. But that didn’t stop it from splashing. Backstage, we had these big tubs with OxyClean and water in them. When the curtain closed, the blood-soaked women had to run and take everything off, and everything went in the bins. The bathroom had a utility sink, so Carrie could wash her hair, and the stage manager would bring them their street clothes.”

Now, she’s after the jacked-up jacket. “Jeff will be so happy that it’s going to live again,” she says as she buys it — even before getting Lamplighters’ green light. “Even if we don’t use it, it’s fun. Maybe I’ll wear it on the back of my brother’s motorcycle.”

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Nine concerts to see this September (that aren't already sold out)

By Reader Staff
SAN DIEGO READER

Yes, Pierce the Veil and Robert Plant and J. Cole and Jack White are all coming to San Diego in September. But you probably knew that already. What's more, they're sold out. Here are nine other shows that still had tickets available at press time — some local, some touring, all worth noting.

SANDE LOLLIS FAREWELL CONCERT

Local icon Sande Lollis first earned notice with East County Americana band Enter the Blue Sky. In 2017, she won the West Coast Country Music Association competition for Best Female Vocalist of the Year and Best Female Entertainer of the Year, earning a slot the following year at the national competition at Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Over the past two decades, she has uploaded nearly a hundred performance videos to her Youtube channel, many of them taped locally, but now

she's relocating to the east coast. "Last year, after losing my mom, I inherited her house in Tennessee," she said. "That turn of events set in motion a decision I never imagined making...this city has held so much of my music life, my friends, my collaborators, the rooms where songs were born, the unexpected harmonies, the late-night conversations that turned into melodies. It's where I learned how to stand inside my own voice, and where so many of you first stood with me. Now I'm packing up that life and stepping into something new, carrying both sadness and excitement at the same time." Her farewell-to-San Diego concert includes singer-guitarist Jeff Berkley (Berkley Hart), bassist Jason Littlefield (Archtones), multi-instrumentalist Shawn Rohlf (7th Day Buskers), drummer Danny Campbell (Fish & the Seaweeds), and singer-songwriters Cathryn Beeks (CalAmity) and Bonnie Nicholls.



Sande Lollis at Big Rock Studios. (Photo courtesy of Sande Lollis)

Where:

Normal Heights United Methodist Church,
4650 Mansfield Street, San Diego

When:

Friday, Sept. 4, 6 pm

Ages: All ages

Cost: \$25

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Fenix TX (San Diego Reader file photo)

FENIX TX

Though two of the members currently live in San Diego County, pop-punk band Fenix TX was originally based in Texas and known as Riverfenix. Their debut 1997 album Drive Thru resulted in Mark Hoppus managing the band while he was still playing with Blink-182. Both groups toured together until Fenix TX split in 2002, though a few brief reunions ensued. After Blink-182 announced its reformation in 2009, the classic Fenix TX lineup reunited as well. One of the original members, Adam Lewis, passed away from cancer in 2024, prompting the band to prepare previously unreleased material to release in memory of Lewis and for the benefit of his family. Their Big Fish EP dropped in March, and includes four rare or previously unreleased recordings from 1999: “Damn For Real?,” “Abbazabba You My Only Friend,” “Mountain Dewd” and a demo of “Phoebe Cates.”

Where:

The Casbah, 2501 Kettner Blvd, San Diego

When:

Saturday, Sept. 5, at 8:30 pm

Ages: 21+

Cost: \$25–\$30

FOOLS AND FRIENDS

Local songwriter collective Fools and Fables takes over the Casbah for Fools and Friends, an eight-artist showcase featuring Alex Bergan, Sutton James, Justin Rodriguez, Jesse Lamonaca, Shelbi Bennett, The Wellsprings, Aly Rowell and C. Gibbs. It’s something of a comeback show for Lamonaca, who recently released two singles in advance of his first recording in nearly 15 years. (He recorded his last album, *The Lament of Tumbleweed Hawk*, with his band *The Dime Novels* and nabbed a Best Americana nomination at the San Diego Music Awards in 2012.) “In the last five years, something shifted where music came back to front and center in my life,” he said, “and I started writing the songs that I’ve been waiting to write.” “The Way,” currently streaming online, is “a song about absence and rediscovery,” he says, “about being lost and finding your way home. It opens on a misty river — a swarm of swallows, a grey morning, a soul that gets a little straighter at the bend — and ends with a confession.”

Jesse Lamonaca

(San Diego Reader file photo)



Where: The Casbah, 2501 Kettner Blvd, San Diego

When: Friday, Sept. 4 at 8 pm

Ages: 21+ **Cost:** \$20

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MY TOWN FEST

Taking place over two days, the My Town festival is back to celebrate decades of San Diego music with a number of noteworthy appearances and reunions. The bill for Saturday, Sept. 12 includes punk icons The Zeros celebrating their 50th anniversary, Everready's first show in over ten years, 1980s punk band Dum Dum Boys, 90s punk rockers The Mice (marking their first performance in around six years), Sex Pistols-Spice Girls mashup Spice Pistols, hardcore punk chick rockers Revolt Chix, Gizzards, Hour of Pearl, Substitute Gym Teacher, Holding Grudges and Rat Tricks. Sunday, Sept. 13 features The Neighbors celebrating 34 years of hyperfast hardcore, politically aware all-vegetarian anti-war punkers Diatribe (known as the first American D-Beat, circa early 1980s), Santa Claus (1985 thrash) War Fever, Doc Hammer (named after one of the talents

behind the TV cartoon show The Venture Brothers), Subversive Intent (members of The Eulogy, In Control, Meth Breath, Stay Away), Philistine (members of Waco Fuck/DEA), Moral Genocide (members from Battalion of Saints and Systematic Abuse), Aggravate (ex-Impulse), Lummux Delux (ex-Crossed Out) and Infernal Tide Riders.

Where:

The Holding Company, 5046
Newport Avenue, San Diego

When:

Saturday and Sunday, Sept.
12 and 13 starting at 1 pm

Ages: 21+ **Cost:** \$32.50



My Town event poster. (Used with permission)



"Not quite my tempo." "Weird Al" performs in Whiplash as part of his Bigger and Weirder tour. (YouTube screenshot)

"WEIRD AL" YANKOVIC

You will meet people who will tell you that the triumph of nerd culture began with the rise of comic book movies — Peter Parkers of the world, unite! Eventually, Robert Downey Jr. will come along and make science cool! These people are mistaken. It began in 1985, when "Weird Al" Yankovic released "Eat It" just a year after Michael Jackson's "Beat It." Michael Jackson was the King of Pop. Thriller was (and is) the best-selling album of all time. And here was this guy singing "Have a banana, have a whole bunch/ It doesn't matter what you had for lunch/ Just eat it." Five months later, Revenge of the Nerds hit theaters. Of course, the great thing about Yankovic is that he wasn't a one-off novelty act. He's stayed sharp for decades, outlasting nearly all of the stars he started out parodying.

Where:

The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park, 222 Marina Park Way, San Diego

When:

Wednesday, Sept. 16 at 7 pm

Ages: All ages **Cost:** \$71–\$225

ADAMS AVENUE STREET FAIR

Hey Magic 8 Ball: will Normal Heights ever be properly gentrified? Signs point to no. It's just too stubbornly itself. Your humble correspondent once looked at a house within sight of the Kensington sign. "Don't kid yourself," warned the realtor. "You will never be Kensington." Thank goodness? The 44th annual Adams Avenue Street Fair fills 10 blocks of Normal Heights with 75 musical acts on six stages, making it Southern California's largest free two-day music festival. This year's bill mixes nationally known performers such as veteran rapper Masta Ace and blues guitarist Chris Duarte, plus a particularly deep roster of San Diego acts, including Bardo, Boostive, Creepxotica, Wild Wild Wets and Euphoria Brass Band. Scheduled artists include: Los Fabulocos, Sue Palmer & Her Motel Swing Orchestra, The Midnight Rivals, Kimmi Bitter, Jahtiva, Gayle Skidmore, Please Ask for Paul, The Wellsprings, Stucky Leigh, Rookie Card and Poor Thing.

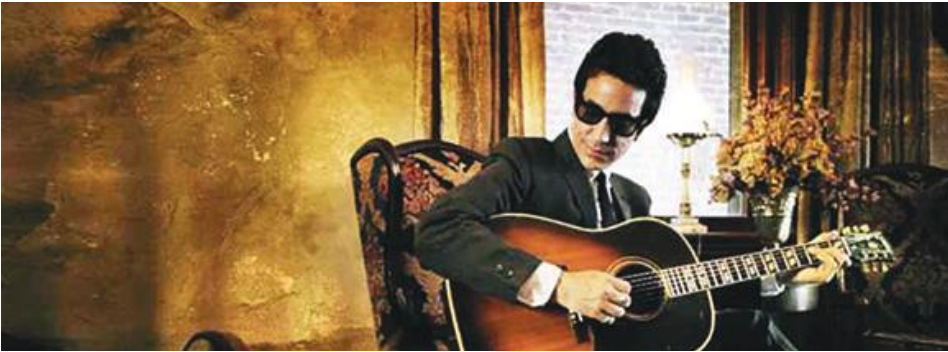


You know it's a good street fair when you can't even see the street.
(San Diego Reader file photo)

Where:
Adams Avenue, Normal Heights

When:
Saturday, Sept. 19, 10 am–10 pm; Sunday, Sept. 20, 10 am–6 pm

Ages: All ages **Cost:** FREE



A.J. Croce (San Diego Reader file photo)

A.J. CROCE

"I'm pretty eclectic," said singer-songwriter A.J. Croce. "I've been filed in five or six different genres in stores and on the radio, so it may be easiest to describe my music as Ray Charles meets Ray Davies, or Elvis Presley meets Elvis Costello, or John Hurt meets John Lennon, or maybe Randy Newman meets Jim Croce, which was my first concert." Now, he celebrates both his own 35-year career and the music of his father, Jim Croce, with Croce Plays Croce, mixing songs such as "Operator," "Time in a Bottle," and "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" with his own roots, blues, soul and rock material. Croce deliberately avoided performing his father's catalog for decades while establishing himself as an artist in his own right. That changed in 2017, and in 2022, the 50th Anniversary celebration of his father's breakthrough album You Don't Mess Around With Jim saw the beginning of the Croce Plays Croce tour that he's bringing to his adopted hometown.

Where:
Humphrey's Concerts by the Bay, 2241 Shelter Island Drive, San Diego

When:
Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026 at 7:30 pm

Ages: All ages **Cost:** \$82.90

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CRSSD FESTIVAL

Who knew that EDM fans would enjoy blissing out while watching the sunset over the water instead of baking in the desert outside of Vegas? For that matter, who knew San Diego was secretly cool? San Diego's homegrown CRSSD Festival has grown since its 2015 debut into one of the West Coast's major electronic-music festivals, drawing roughly 34,000 attendees over two days and emphasizing house, techno and crossover electronic acts rather than EDM spectacle. Fall 2026 is topped by a Chris Lake b2b Disclosure DJ set, with Mochakk, Boys Noize, Groove Armada, Skepta's Más Tiempo project, I Hate Models, Marlon Hoffstadt and many, many others spread across the Ocean View, Palms and City Steps stages.

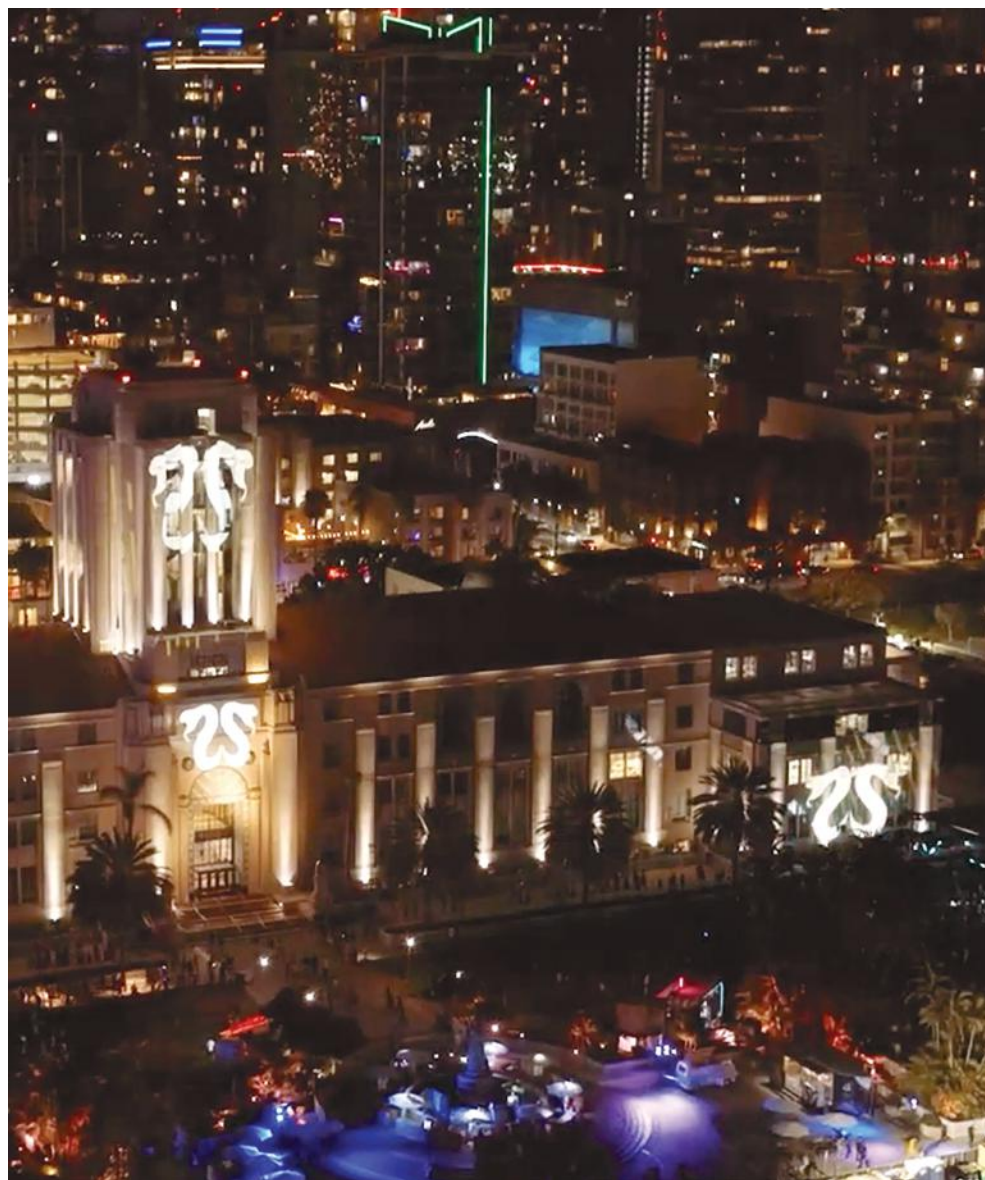
Where:

Waterfront Park, 1600 Pacific Highway

When:

Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 26–27, noon–10 pm

Ages: 21+ **Cost:** \$214–\$440



CRSSD lights up the night in 2025. (YouTube screenshot)



Collective Soul (YouTube screenshot)

COLLECTIVE SOUL

Trent Reznor famously said that hearing Johnny Cash's cover of Nine Inch Nails' "Hurt" felt "like someone kissing your girlfriend." And after he saw the video, he even more famously said, "Wow, I just lost my girlfriend, because that song isn't mine any more." That line came to mind during Twitter's collective swoon over Dolly Parton's cover of Collective Soul's "Shine" after the music legend died last week at the age of 80. Parton's cover is legit great, and has a more obvious piety about it when it pleads "Heaven, let your light shine down." But Collective Soul is a band, and Dean Roland's guitar riff is as much a part of what makes that song work as anything in the lyrics. Verdict: similar, but not the same as the Cash grab.

Where:

Humphrey's Concerts by the Bay,
2241 Shelter Island Dr., San Diego

When:

Friday, Sept. 25, 2026,
at 7:30 pm

Ages: All Ages

Cost: \$128–\$304

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