

unique opportunity to see what the local music and film industry is doing.

Cornell: Land of Sky Regional Council was awarded major grants from the Appalachian Regional Council and Dogwood Health Trust to begin building creative manufacturing infrastructure in Western North Carolina. This will help large and small arts businesses producing things in multiples to grow their businesses across the region. ArtsAVL is thrilled to be a partner in this initiative.

In 2023, what encouraged you most about the local arts scene and what discouraged you most?

Cornell: One of the most encouraging and discouraging issues happening in the local arts scene in 2023 is the renovation of Thomas Wolfe Auditorium. After shutting down due to a major HVAC failure, it finally appears like the city is going to move forward with some major renovations to the historic space — even though it will not be a quick fix and comes with a big price tag.

Moore: I was so encouraged that Buncombe County included \$129,788 in line item funding for arts and culture in the 2022-23 budget for regranting through ArtsAVL, our local arts council. The arts are an essential part of the vibrancy of Asheville and the surrounding area. However, I am discouraged that the city and regional foundations have not yet recognized the importance of support.

Hinkle: I've felt good and relieved to witness the post-COVID, ongoing return of folks who were largely absent during the pandemic. It took a long-ish time for many of them to return to something like their previous attendance habits. There seems to be more laughing.

On the other hand, I'm a bit discouraged from what I can see by the decreasing number of venues that can be categorized as "listening rooms." Too many times, artists play an event where they wish to present their creations or interpretations in such ways that they need ears, yet there's a noise level too high for them to be effective. Their music loses a large fraction of what it was intended to accomplish. Over the longer haul, it's a process that tends to make the music become part of the wallpaper. It's "music by the pound."

Murphy: I'm encouraged by the comedy, improvisation and independent film scenes growing. And I'm discouraged by the lack of mingling of more artistic communities. There's not enough cross-pollination.

Durocher: AVLfest was obviously a big exciting thing for the local

music scene this year. As a performer and a fan, I thought the festival went amazingly well, and I'm really excited to see it develop in future years. I also love seeing bands from Asheville doing great on the national scene, like **Indigo De Souza**, Wednesday and Secret Agent 23 Skidoo.

The discouraging things are always the same for me: it's hard for artists to make a living, especially making unique, original music or art. And that's getting tougher as the cost of living in Asheville goes up. I do worry that we might, at some point, price ourselves out of the kind of people that make this place so interesting and special.

What social issue didn't get enough attention within the local arts scene this year?

Cunningham: Social issues affecting the African American and Latinx experience in Asheville. These artists are immensely talented and get little to no recognition of the culture and community they represent.

Moore: Mental health issues have drastically risen since the pandemic. Participating in the arts enables people to deal with a wide range of distress, individually and within a community. Artists are supporting efforts to address critical issues all over the region, which deserve recognition and support. We have this amazing tool — art — that is ready-made for human connection and healing.

Cornell: A growing issue within the creative sector is the need for affordable creative space. Due to the rising cost of living and workspaces, many creatives can no longer afford to live in Buncombe County. Many are moving to surrounding counties or even out of state. ArtsAVL will be conducting a creative spaces study in early 2024 to more closely examine this issue. The report, with an accompanying town hall event, will come out in May.

Murphy: I think the theater scene should be playing with much deeper issues. The need for the arts to challenge us to think and look at ourselves in scary and real ways is extremely necessary right now.

Hinkle: I think anything we can do to bring together the folks who give charitably to local causes and the recipients of that aid could potentially "de-stranger" us. If we were able to see our fellow humans as very much like ourselves, some of our local social problems would be balloons with slow leaks. The potential is to not see "us providing largess to them" or "them" feeling patronized by us. Instead, I might be just another guy with a funny haircut speaking a similar language with no strings attached. ❌

THIS WEEK AT



Wed
20th

TRIVIA TRIVIA NIGHT 6:30 PM

Hosted by Adam & Mike

Teams Welcome ⚡ Cool Prizes ⚡ 18+

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Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville

R&B and Soul hits by Whitney Houston, Adele, Chaka Khan, and more with the fabulous Capathia Jenkins backed by your Asheville Symphony

Visit AshevilleSymphony.org for details!