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11 weird moments from the 2011 arts scene

A compilation of some of the highly enjoyable foibles of the 2011 arts world, including the "Museum of Non-Visible Art"; "the 'enfant terrible' of the German theater scene" picked to direct Wagner's "Ring"; a group of people sitting in an art gallery's window playing strip poker; and, oh, so much more.

By [Melinda Bargreen](#)

When David Hallberg (shown with Svetlana Zakharova) became the first American member of the Bolshoi Ballet, another member of the ballet was less than welcoming.

It's Christmas Day, and now that you've unwrapped that hideous tie from your brother-in-law and swallowed that last bite of turkey, perhaps it is time to consider some real turkey. We refer to the highly enjoyable foibles of the arts world in 2011, collected here for you as a Christmas gift to remind you that your relatives around the holiday table are not, after all, the weirdest people in the world.

Consider the following — and the fact that a brand-new year awaits us.

Bayreuth Gone Wild: At the renowned Bayreuth Festival in Germany, the new Wagnerian "Ring" marking Wagner's bicentenary in 2013 will be directed by Frank Castorf, whom one reviewer called "the 'enfant terrible' of the German theater scene." Previous Castorf presentations have included a vomiting Trojan horse and a machine gun in "Die Meistersinger," not to mention throwing paint at the audience and requiring actors to scream through an entire production. Bring on the "Ring"; we can't wait!

But they will have to work to beat Sebastian Baumgarten's staging of Wagner's "Tannhäuser" this year at Bayreuth, a show that featured Tannhäuser in his underwear, the heroine Elisabeth entering a recycling center and disintegrating herself, copulating animals in a cage and members of the audience sitting on the stage. Noted tenor/conductor Plácido Domingo commented on the show: "I have a problem with it," referring to the production aesthetic. "It's incomprehensible."

The emperor's brand-new wardrobe: A new project called the "Museum of Non-Visible Art," of which actor James Franco is a patron, is based (according to NPR's Eyder Peralta) on the concept that "the works of art don't exist physically, instead they are imagined by the artist. So when you purchase the 'work of art' you get a 'card' to hang on an empty wall and you 'describe it to your audience.' "

We think we'll "hang on to our wallet."

Conduct him to the exit: Moscow's culture minister has fired Mark Gorenstein, music director of the Svetlanov State Symphony Orchestra for the past nine years — during which 280 musicians were either fired or left voluntarily. (A symphony orchestra usually has about 90 players, so this is quite a turnover.) Earlier this year, Gorenstein was fired by the Tchaikovsky Competition for making a racial slur about Armenian cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan in front of the cellist (who went on to win the gold medal).

Don't rile up those church musicians: In Mobile County, Ala., last August, a minister of music at a church in the St. Elmo community zapped the pastor with a Taser gun after the pastor fired him. Several church members became involved, including Agolia Moore, the music minister's mother, who suffered a stab wound at the hands of a deacon.

Another church choir — the Frazer United Methodist Church Youth Choir of Montgomery, Ala. — got into trouble for spontaneously singing the National Anthem in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol building last July. They were advised by security that it was against the law to sing without a permit in the building.

Know when to fold 'em: Art in General, an alternative-art space at 79 Walker St. in Tribeca, opened a new exhibition last month called "I'll Raise You One ... " in which a group of people sit in the gallery's storefront window space and play strip poker for all to see. The curator had to turn people away when his call for participants received such a large response (50 participants were chosen).

Dressing for success: At the Hollywood Bowl last summer, the pianist Yuja Wang wore a dress that "was so short and tight that had there been any less of it, the Bowl might have been forced to restrict admission to any music lover under 18 not accompanied by an adult." (This from Los Angeles Times reviewer Mark Swed.)

Maybe there were too many high notes: China's 1-year-old Guangzhou Opera House is falling apart, with large cracks in the walls and ceilings of the \$210 million structure, and large glass and granite panels falling off. It was designed by architect Zaha Hadid and resoundingly praised in The New York Times.

Scalping Leonardo: London's National Gallery is fuming over the resale of tickets to its blockbuster Leonardo da Vinci exhibition (through Feb. 5), considered the most complete display of Leonardo's work ever shown and (according to BBC News) featuring seven paintings never seen in public. The exhibition tickets (about \$25) are now being resold on sites such as eBay for up to about \$619. The gallery is contacting resale websites to request that they "stop immediately."

How about a bargain Strad? An Irishman who reportedly stole a Stradivarius violin worth about \$1.9 million tried to sell it for about \$232 to a man sitting next to him in a London Internet cafe. The accused thief, John Maughan, snatched the fiddle from violinist Min-Jin Kym as she

ate in a fast-food restaurant. According to court records, the Internet cafe offer was refused because the man's daughter "already had a recorder."

A long way from Rapid City: South Dakota-born David Hallberg, the first American member of the legendary 235-year-old Bolshoi Ballet, starred in a new production of "The Sleeping Beauty" — but his coup got a snarky response from Bolshoi premier dancer Nikolay Tsiskaridze, who called Hallberg's casting "an insult to the entire Russian ballet, a demonstration of indifference to the rich Russian tradition and culture." Tsiskaridze, by the way, is ethnically Georgian.

Genuine Eurotrash: American conductor Carl St. Clair resigned his post as music director of Berlin's Komische Oper over a new production of Beethoven's "Fidelio." St. Clair said "eurotrash" was the appropriate designation for this production, which " ... is literally about trash. The principal prop of Daniel Cremer's set is a shipping container with an oppressive array of plastic garbage bags and other debris in and around it. It can't be overemphasized just how ugly this production is."

Melinda Bargreen