

Masque Soirée: Creative Genius

Artful ingenuity is the hallmark of first-time Wonder Gardens event



The Everglades Wonder Gardens is unveiling a new special event for 2021 that promises to be a saturation of the senses, with varied live music, interactive and experiential art, wildlife encounters with the gardens' staff and more.

Masque Soirée is set for the evening of Saturday, March 13, featuring more than 15 local and internationally renowned artists, plein-air painters and musicians on strings, dulcimer and flute.

Famed master Italian street painter Jane Portaluppi Durand will create on site, as will renowned plein-air painter Paul Arsenault. An interactive art installation by Jackie Morelisse will be a feast for the senses in the gardens' Robert and Karin Moe Tea House.

The evening is intended for guests to experience art "in the moment," says Zawi Borsa, Wonder Gardens' event and marketing manager, who is curating the happening. Borsa has worked with the presenting artists in the past and is excited to bring their multidisciplinary creative expressions to the Wonder Gardens.

Lily Hatchett's Paper Grotto will feature artists applying layers of white paper to form a sculpture background on which images are projected. Viewers will be captivated by what is moving and what is not.

Plein-air painters will be stationed throughout the Wonder Gardens, and local artist Andrew McClure's nature-movement installation with plants is what might be described as atmospheric composition.

Guests can experience free animal encounters with snakes, baby gators and parrots, and enjoy photo opportunities with them. Photo opps will also be available in the Paper Grotto.

"The Wonder Gardens is leading with safety in mind for the Masque Soirée, with our 'mask required, creativity encouraged,' one-of-a-kind event of the year," Borsa says. Masque Soirée is a play on "masquerade" and invites attendees to decorate and have fun with their masks for this event, she adds. "This is also the first time that an evening event at the Wonder Gardens of this magnitude is accessibly priced for families to enjoy the gardens at night.

"There will be fabulous food and drinks available for purchase, including Roots to Fruits Organic Farm Food Truck and Vesuvius Wood Fired Pizza," she says.

The 85-year-old Wonder Gardens is home to rescued and non-releasable birds and reptiles nestled among sprawling banyan trees and plantings. While preserving the best of the historic Wonder Gardens, the charitable organization is caring for more than 300 resident animals, upgrading wildlife enclosures, growing the botanical beauty of the property, adding education programs and events, and further engaging the community to enjoy this jewel in historic downtown Bonita Springs.

"A cultural icon, the Wonder Gardens stands as one of the few remaining cornerstones of Old Florida," Borsa says. "Here, we tell a story there are few left to tell while educating our region on our important environment and wildlife."

If You Go...

What: Masque Soirée

When: 6-9 p.m. Saturday, March 13

Where: Everglades Wonder Gardens, 27180 Old 41 Road, Bonita Springs

Price: \$30 for adults; \$15 for children ages 3-12; free for children under 3.

Tickets: Go to [tickets](#)

Info: www.wondergardens.org or 239-992-2591

Note: Virtual attendance is available to those who cannot attend in person.