Chicago offers holiday delights to make the season bright

By Miriam Y. Cintron
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Whether you want to experience the holidays by enjoying colorful light displays in the great outdoors or listening to holiday classics in the warmth of a theater, you have plenty of options, with Chicago area attractions providing so much to see, hear, and do this winter season.

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

… The 125-voice Apollo Chorus of Chicago will perform Handel’s Messiah, featuring Baroque period music complete with soloists and an orchestra. Performances will be held at 7 p.m. Sat., Dec. 8, at North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd. in Skokie, and 3 p.m. Sun., Dec. 16, at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph Dr. Tickets are $45 to $55. For ticket information, call (312) 427-5620 or visit www.apollochorus.org.

… The Chicago Loop Alliance (CLA) will offer Winter WonderLoop surprises every Saturday through Dec. 22. Specific details on free, spontaneous, family-friendly experiences around the Loop will be announced each morning at www.WinterWonderLoop.com and on CLA’s Facebook page and Twitter feed. Holiday revelers also can visit the website for more than 100 special offers, events, promotions, and destination ideas from CLA member businesses and organizations through Tuesday, Dec. 31.

… Visitors in the Loop will encounter “random acts of holidays” that include street performances from Goodman Theatre and Joffrey Ballet players; giveaways of hot beverages, pastries, and prizes from the Corner Bakery; free pop-up photo booths, complete with props, from SmileBooth; strolling carolers and bands from local colleges and high schools; and Berghoff Restaurant mascot Herman the German giving away custom steins, ornaments, and treats. In addition, through Mon., Dec. 31, CLA presents Lightscape, featuring holiday classics choreographed to colorful LED light displays. For more information, visit www.chicagoloopalliance.com or www.winterwonderloop.com.

… Inspired by the Nuremberg Christmas market dating back to 1545, Christkindlmarket offers handmade gifts, ornaments, European fabrics, German delicacies, and spiced wine. It operates through Mon., Dec. 24, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sun. through Thurs. and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Fri. and Sat. at Daley Plaza, 50 W. Washington St. Admission is free. Special events to be held in the open-air Christmas market include a performance of The Christmas Schooner at 4 p.m. Fri., Dec. 7, a book signing by Chef Alain Roby at 12:15 p.m. Sun., Dec. 16, singing from the Canterbury Carolers at 6:30 p.m. Wed., Dec. 19, and a concert by the Lincoln Way West High School madrigal singers at 5:30 p.m. Sun, Dec. 23. Visit www.christkindlmarket.com.

… Also at Daley Plaza is the Underwriters Laboratories Santa House, where children and families can have their picture taken with Santa for free and participate in various activities through Mon., Dec. 24. Hours are 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., with Santa on break from 3 to 4 p.m., and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Dec. 24.

… Guests can take a docent-led tour highlighting Christmas customs and decorations of the mid-19th century at the Clarke House Museum, 1827 S. Indiana Ave., and Glessner House Museum, 1800 S.
Prairie Ave. Tickets are $10 for adults, $9 for seniors and students, $6 for children ages five through 12, and free for children younger than five. Call (312) 326-1480 for details.

… Every Sat. and Sun. through Dec. 23, Macy’s, 111 N. State St., will host Santa Breakfast, where families can eat and have their picture taken with Santa. Reservations required; tickets cost $17.95 per person and $13.95 for children younger than ten. Call (877) 556-2297. New this year is a special holiday dinner buffet and Magical Evening with Santa at 5 p.m. Sat., Dec. 15. Call (877) 556-2997 for information and to make a reservation. Guests at the iconic store also can stop by the Walnut Room to admire the 45-foot Great Tree decorated with more than 1,200 ornaments and 25,000 lights and stroll by the famous holiday window displays.

… The John Hancock Observatory, 875 N. Michigan Ave., once again invites Chicagoans to experience the holidays more than 1,000 feet in the air with Breakfast with Santa every Sat. and Sun., Dec. 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, and 23 at 8:30 and 11 a.m. Tickets are $45 for adults, $35 for youth, and $15 for infants. Reservations are required. Santa also will be available for pictures for the observatory’s Santa in the Sky event every Sat. and Sun through Dec. 24 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. While there, families may check out the Winter Wonderland Holiday Train. Call (312) 654-5019 or visit www.hancockobservatory.com.

CONCERTS

… The Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St., will host free holiday concerts and performances throughout December in Preston Bradley Hall. On Sundays at 3 p.m., the Salon Series will feature classical music by local, national, and internationally based artists.

… On Classical Mondays at 12:15 p.m., classical, chamber music, and opera concerts will feature Chicago-based instrumentalists and vocalists.

… The Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts every Wed. at 12:15 p.m. present solo and ensemble performances of classical music by young musicians.

… Organized by the International Music Foundation, the Live Music Now! young people’s concert series is aimed at Chicago Public School students and offers various musical styles from many cultures. For reservations, call (312) 670-6888.

… The free interactive Dance-Along Nutcracker encourages audience members, young and old, to dance along with professional dancers. The Lakeside Pride Symphonic Band will provide the music. Performances are at noon and 3 p.m. Sun., Dec. 9.

… For information on all Chicago Cultural Center events, call (312) 744-3316 or visit www.chicagoculturalcenter.org.

… Among the many special concerts planned for December, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 220 S. Michigan Ave., will once again perform Welcome Yule! The show presents traditional carols, dancers, a children’s chorus, and special appearances by Santa and others. Featured musicians will come from the CSO’s percussion scholarship program, which selects students ages four through 12 for weekly and individual instruction. Performances will be held at Symphony Center Fri., Dec. 14 and 21, at 7 p.m.; Sat., Dec. 15 and 22, at 3 p.m.; and Sun., Dec. 16, and 23, at 1:30 and 5:30 p.m. Tickets cost $35 to $108. For information, call (312) 294-3000 or visit www.cso.org.

… The City Hall Holiday Concert Series will showcase children’s choirs from all over the city performing in the City Hall lobby’s west end, 121 N. LaSalle St., every weekday from noon to 1 p.m.
through Fri., Dec. 21. Performers include the Edgar Allan Poe classical school choir on Fri., Dec. 7; the Queen of Angels choristers on Mon., Dec. 10; the Skinner West primary chorus on Tues., Dec. 11; the St. Richard Elementary School choir on Wed., Dec. 12; the Holy Cross/Immaculate Heart of Mary choir and marimba band on Thurs., Dec. 13; the Hubbard High School advanced ensemble on Fri., Dec. 14; the Franklin Fine Arts Center choir on Mon., Dec. 17; the Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School bands and choirs on Tues., Dec. 18; the Misericordia Heart Zingers on Wed., Dec. 19; the Providence St. Mel School choir on Thurs., Dec. 20; and the Robert Healy chorus and ensemble on Fri., Dec. 21.

… The Chicago Children’s Choir will perform at the Beverly Neighborhood Choir holiday concert at 7:30 p.m. Tues., Dec. 18, at the Beverly Arts Center, 2407 W. 111th St. Call (312) 849-8300 or visit www.ccchoir.org.

… Mexican composer and conductor Jorge Córdoba Valencia will serve as guest music director for Chicago a capella’s Navidad en Mexico concert series, highlighting Mexico’s choral history. Performances take place at 8 p.m. Fri., Dec. 7, at Fourth Presbyterian Church, Michigan Avenue at Delaware Place, and 4 p.m. Sun., Dec. 9, at Wentz Concert Hall, 171 E. Chicago Ave. in Naperville. Call (773) 281-7820 or visit www.chicagoacappella.org.

… Trinity Christian College, 6601 W. College Dr. in Palos Heights, IL, will host a Christmas concert by Musichorale at 3:20 p.m. Sun., Dec. 9. Tickets are $12 in advance or $14 at the door. Call (312) 409-6661 or visit www.musichorale.org.

… The Lakeside Singers’ winter concert series celebrates its 14th year with both traditional and unusual seasonal songs. All performances are at 8 p.m. and will be presented Mon., Dec. 10, at Metropolis Performing Arts Center, 111 W. Campbell St., Arlington Heights; Fri., Dec. 14, Fourth Presbyterian Church, 126 E. Chestnut St., Chicago; and Sat., Dec. 15, Wentz Hall, 171 E. Chicago Ave., Naperville. Ticket prices vary by venue. Visit www.lakesidesingers.com.

MUSEUMS

… The Cuneo Museum and Gardens grounds and interior at 1350 N. Milwaukee Ave. in Vernon Hills, IL, will sport scenic lights for the annual Winter Wonderland holiday light show. Families can drive through the 97-acre property to enjoy the show from 6 to 10 p.m. through Mon., Dec. 31 (except Mon. and Tues., Dec. 24 and Dec. 25, when the grounds are closed). The cost is $10 per car on weekends and $5 per car on weeknights. Visitors also can enjoy an open house with Santa on Fri., Dec. 14, from 6:30 to 9 p.m., which includes a self-guided tour of the mansion, a make-a-wreath contest, and a holiday light show.

A Velveteen Rabbit play aimed at getting visitors into the holiday spirit will be held at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Dec. 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, and 23. Tickets are $5 for children ages 12 and younger and $7 for adults. Guests who bring an unwrapped toy for Toys for Tots will receive a free cup of hot chocolate. Call (847) 362-3042 or visit www.cuneomansion.org.

… With winter now upon us, visitors to the Field Museum, 1400 S. Lake Shore Dr., can discover an even colder, icier world with Titans of the Ice Age 3-D, set thousands of years before modern civilization. The presentation runs through Mon., Dec. 31. Other exhibits to check out while at the museum include Extreme Mammals, which runs through Sun., Jan. 6; Maharaja: The Splendor of India’s Royal Courts, running through Sun., Feb. 3; and Fashion and The Field Museum Collection: Maria Pinto, through Sun., June 16. Call (312) 922-9410 or visit www.fieldmuseum.org.
Now in its 71st year, the Museum of Science and Industry’s Christmas Around the World and Holidays of Light exhibits will feature a colorful theme inspired by the museum’s new Charlie Brown and the Great Exhibit display. The exhibit features more than 50 12-foot trees decorated by volunteers from ethnic communities around Chicago. The traditional 45-foot Grand Tree boasts more than 30,000 lights and hundreds of ornaments, including ones with Snoopy, Woodstock, and other classic Charlie Brown characters. Visitors also can enjoy performances from a variety of dance and choral groups on the holiday stage. The exhibit runs through Sun., Jan. 6. The museum is located at located at 57th Street and Lake Shore Drive. Call (773) 684-1414 or visit www.msichicago.org.

The John G. Shedd Aquarium will become a watery winter wonderland with the return of its Holiday Fantasia aquatic show through Sat., Jan. 5. The show spotlights Pacific white-sided dolphins, beluga whales, sea lions, and penguins, with a special appearance by Santa. The Shedd’s Jingle Jazzin’ Evenings will feature live music and holiday treats from 5 to 9 p.m. Sun. through Sun., Dec. 16 through 23. Also, the museum’s auditorium will present the 4-D show Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas. Families can participate in the Shedd holiday breakfasts, where they can have pictures taken with Santa and view the Polar Express 4-D show, on the Saturdays of Dec. 8, 15, and 22; admission is $44.95 for adults and $34.95 for children ages three to 11. Experience all the Shedd has to offer even longer with extended hours Sun. through Sun., Dec. 16 through 23, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Wed. through Sun., Dec. 26 through 30, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. The aquarium is located at 1200 S. Lake Shore Dr. Call (312) 939-2438 or visit www.sheddaquarium.org.

The popular Thorne Miniature Rooms at the Art Institute, 111 S. Michigan Ave., will showcase holiday decorations and traditions of the past. In addition to the nine rooms traditionally featured, see a new Pennsylvania (Dutch) room as well as an original German Rococo room for the first time in 50 years. At a member workshop from 2 to 4 p.m. on Sat., Dec. 8, Thorne Rooms caretaker Lindsay Mican Morgan will share the process for decorating the tiny spaces, and participants can create their own Victorian holiday decorations; reservations are required, and admission is $30 for adults and children ages 12 and older. Also check out the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Treasures from the British Museum exhibit, which runs through Sun., Aug. 25. Call (312) 443-3600 or visit www.artinstituteofchicago.org.

The Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, 610 S. Michigan Ave, will host Tales, Myths, and Nightmares, a lecture by artist Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, at 3 p.m. Sun., Dec. 9. An exhibit of Petrovsky-Shtern’s work reflecting the Jewish experience runs through Tues., Dec. 18. Call (312) 322-1773 or visit www.spertus.edu.

The women’s board of the DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 E. 56th Pl., will host the 19th annual Holiday Glitz benefit gala at 4 p.m. Sun., Dec. 9, at McCormick Place featuring dinner, dancing, and a raffle and auction. Exhibits on display in the museum include Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner and Buried Treasures: Art in African American Museums; both run through Mon., Dec. 31. Call (773) 947-0600 or visit www.dusablemuseum.org.

Children and their families who visit the Chicago Children’s Museum at Navy Pier, 700 E. Grand Ave, can build a snow fort, ice skate, dress like a snowman, and throw snowballs in the museum’s Snow Much Fun exhibit. They can also skate in their socks with Pretend You’re on Ice! Both exhibits run through Sun., Jan. 6 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call (773) 947-0600 or visit www.chicagochildrensmuseum.org.

Guests at the Driehaus Museum, 40 E. Erie St., can experience firsthand the winter of 1899 with Help Wanted: The Holiday Servants’ Tour led by a British housekeeper, who also offers lessons on preparing for the holiday season. Tours run at 5:30 p.m. every Fri. and Sat. and at 10 a.m. on Sun. through Dec. 30. The cost is $15 for adults and $8 for children 12 and younger. Also, magician Sean Masterson will provide some holiday magic with shows at 3 p.m. on Sat. and Sun., Dec. 8, 9, 15, and 16; tickets are $12.
for adults and $8 for children ages 8 through 12. Enjoy Home for the Holidays: An Evening of Cabaret performed by Beckie Menzie and Tom Michael on Thurs., Dec. 13, at 6 p.m. Admission is $35 for museum members and $45 for the public. Call (312) 482-8933 or visit www.driehausmuseum.org.

… The second annual winter camp at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, 2430 N. Cannon Dr., for children ages three through nine will allow youngsters to create nature-inspired art, enjoy live animal encounters, and snow play. The camp runs 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily from Jan. 2 to 4. The cost is $50 per day or $125 for all three days. Visit www.naturemuseum.org.

OUTDOOR FAMILY FUN

… Lincoln Park Zoo’s 18th annual winter festival ZooLights features two million lights, tons of activities, holiday crafts, and photos with Santa Claus through Sun., Dec. 23. New this year are glittering light tunnels and giant character displays. The free event runs every Fri. through Sun. through Dec. 23, and daily from Wed., Dec. 26, through Sun., Jan. 6. Hours are 5 to 9 p.m. Also, Friday Night Lights: Polar Party welcomes children ages four and five to communicate with penguins and imagine life in the north and south poles on the Fridays of Dec. 7 and 21 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. and from 7 to 8 p.m. The cost is $16 for nonmembers; registration is required. The zoo is located at 2200 N. Cannon Dr. Call (312) 742-2000 or visit www.lpzoo.org.

… The McCormick Tribune Ice Rink in Millennium Park, which draws more than 100,000 skaters annually, is free and open to the public. The rink is located on Michigan Avenue between Washington and Madison Streets and remains open through Sun., March 10. Skate rental is available for $10. Visit www.millenniumpark.org.

… Millennium Park also hosts Caroling at Cloud Gate at Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street every Fri. at 6 p.m. through Dec. 21. The free outdoor event invites Chicago choral groups and visitors alike to perform holiday classics.

… Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand Ave., hosts the 12th annual Winter WonderFest, which presents a 170,000-square-foot holiday themed winter playground featuring music, indoor ice skating, hang gliding, a ropes obstacle course, inflatable slides, carnival rides, an indoor Ferris wheel, a create-a-cookie cottage, and a reindeer express train ride. While there, enjoy family friendly shows by jugglers, magicians, and musicians. The fest runs through Sun., Jan. 6. Navy Pier also will ring in the new year on Mon., Dec. 31, with New Year’s Eve family fireworks at 7 p.m., midnight fireworks, the Resolution Ball at 9 p.m. in the grand ballroom, New Year’s Eve 2013 in the Crystal Gardens from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m., and New Year’s Eve fireworks dinner cruises aboard the Mystic Blue, Spirit of Chicago, and Odyssey from 9:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Call (800) 595-7437 or visit www.navypier.com.

THEATER AND STAGE PERFORMANCES

… Emerald City Theatre’s production of Alice in Wonderland runs through Sat., Dec. 29. Single tickets are $10 to $16 before fees. Performances take place at the Apollo Theater, 2540 N. Lincoln Ave. Call (773) 935-6100 or visit www.emeraldcitytheatre.com.

… For the 35th year, the Goodman Theatre brings A Christmas Carol to the stage with an all-Chicago cast of 28. This holiday classic tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, who will be played for the fifth time by Larry Yando. Performances run through Sat., Dec. 29 in the Goodman’s Albert Theatre. Tickets are $25 to $82 and can be purchased by calling (312) 443-3800 or at the theater’s box office, 170 N. Dearborn St. Visit www.goodmantheatre.org.

… The Joffrey Ballet is hosting a 22-performance engagement of The Nutcracker, which features dazzling costumes, an extravagant set, and Robert Joffrey’s original choreography. Performances are at 2 p.m. on Sun., Dec. 9, Mon., Dec. 24, and Thurs., Dec. 27; at 7 p.m. on Thurs., Dec. 13, and Fri., Dec. 7 and 14; and at both 2 and 7 p.m. on Wed., Dec. 26, Thurs., Dec. 20, Fri., Dec. 21, Sat., Dec. 8, 15, and 22, and Sun., Dec. 16 and 23. All performances take place at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Pkwy. Call (312) 386-8905 or visit www.joffrey.com.

… Dr. Seuss’s classic town of Whoville comes to the stage with How the Grinch Stole Christmas! The Musical, featuring hit songs such as You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch. The show runs through Sun., Dec. 16, at the Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W. Randolph St. Tickets range from $18 to $85. Call (877) 280-9582 for tickets or visit www.broadwayinchicago.com.

… The Second City’s Nut-Cracking Holiday Revue blends comedy, music, and the theater’s trademark improvisation through Mon., Dec. 31. The theater is located at 1616 N. Wells St. Call (312) 337-3992 or visit www.secondcity.com.

… The American Blues Theater will present It’s A Wonderful Life: Live at the Biograph! through Sun., Dec. 30. The production features a 1940s radio broadcast of Frank Capra’s holiday classic with live Foley sound effects and an original score. Performances are at 8 p.m. every Thurs. through Sat., with a 5 p.m. matinee every Sat. and a 2:30 p.m. matinee every Sun. at the Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave. Tickets run $19 to $49. Call (773) 871-3000 or visit www.americanbluestheater.com.

… Through Sun., Dec. 23, Provision Theater presents the Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey, which tells the story of a young boy and his mother struggling to come to terms with a devastating loss. Provision Theatre is located at 1001 W. Roosevelt Rd., and free parking is available. Visit www.provisiontheater.org.

… Chicago Tap Theatre presents Tidings of Tap! featuring dances and music to celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, and the winter. Performances are at 8 p.m. Fri. and Sat., Dec. 14 and 15, and at 3 p.m. Sun., Dec. 16, at the University of Illinois Chicago Theatre, 1044 W. Harrison St. Tickets are $35 for adults, $25 for seniors, and $20 for students and dancers. Group discounts available. Call (773) 655-1175.

… Polarity Ensemble Theatre will present He Knows … Christmas Stories! at 7 p.m. Dec. 8 at Josephinum Academy, 1500 N. Bell St. Visit www.petheatre.com.

… Lil’ Buds Theater Co. will perform Santa Due? Santa hires a new elf who creates a Santa clone to help out, but the new Santa begins automating and downsizing the North Pole operation. The show runs at the

SPECIAL TREATS

… See Chicago’s Twelve, an exhibit by twelve artists, through Sunday, Dec. 9, at the Garfield Park Conservatory. On Sat., Dec. 8, from 1 to 2:30 p.m., Julia S. Bachrach, Chicago Park District historian, will speak about and sign her book The City in a Garden: A History of Chicago’s Parks. The conservatory is located at 300 N. Central Park Ave. Call (312) 746-5100.

… The three-day Illinois Artisans Chicago Holiday Art Spree will be held in the Thompson Center atrium, 100 W. Randolph St., from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Dec. 12 to 14, when visitors can buy Illinois made jewelry, paintings, ceramics, and other art.

… Throughout December, visitors to the LegoLand Discovery Center Chicago, 601 N. Martingale Rd. in Schaumburg, IL, can participate in winter-themed speed build challenges, build a giant Lego snowman, and take pictures with lifesize Santa and Snowman Lego models. Call (847) 592-9708 or visit www.legolanddiscoverycenter.com/chicago.