

# Minnesota

Monthly

## Minnesota's Top 10 Events: December 2018

The Holidazzle, Holiday Flower Show, New Year's Eve, and more keep spirits high this month

BY ERIK TORMOEN

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Chill  
PHOTO BY JILLIAN BELL

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## ***Chill* | 12/12-16**

Inspired by the scene in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* of all the kids dancing weirdly to Vince Guaraldi's bouncy piano music, Erinn Liebhard, artistic director of St. Paul's Rhythmically Speaking, last year debuted dance concert *Chill*, where she modeled her own moves after the girl in purple whipping her hair side to side. Now, the nine-person number returns to its casual, beer-friendly setting at St. Paul's [Amsterdam Bar & Hall](#)—this time with the original soundtrack performed in full by Minneapolis jazz quartet GST.

# **PIONEER PRESS**

## **TwinCities●com**

**Nutcracker, Nutcracker, Nutcracker  
— and a hooley? Holiday dance  
performances just got more  
interesting**

By **ROB HUBBARD** | Special to the Pioneer Press

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Dancing in December isn't just about "Nutcrackers." OK, it can seem like it, and there are some interesting variations on that classic ballet being performed around the Twin Cities, sometimes combining the tale of the toy turned prince with other stories or a bit of '60s swinging. But there's also tap, jazz dance and traditional Irish step dancing. Here are a dozen sweet ideas for adding some movement to your celebration.

## **Rhythmically Speaking Dance's Chill**

**Dec. 14-16:** Since its founding in 2009, Rhythmically Speaking Dance has been devoted to "American vernacular dance." In other words, not classical ballet or the kind of modern dance created for the stage, but jazz, folk, hip-hop and any other styles rooted in rhythm. Last year, its leader, Erinn Liebhard, debuted "Chill," a jazz dance work set to Vince Guaraldi's swinging score for "A Charlie Brown Christmas." But it was only half-done last December. Now it's a complete work that features all of Guaraldi's music for the TV cartoon. 7 p.m. Dec. 14, 2 p.m. Dec. 15, 5 p.m. Dec. 16; Amsterdam Bar and Hall, 6 W. Sixth St., St. Paul; \$18-\$16; [ticketfly.com](http://ticketfly.com).

# Prior Lake **American**

Prior Lake High School graduate

# puts on Christmas dance production in St. Paul

By Maggie Stanwood

mstanwood@swpub.com Dec 7, 2018

LINK:

[https://www.swnewsmedia.com/prior\\_lake\\_american/news/prior-lake-high-school-graduate-puts-on-christmas-dance-production/article\\_efc759c0-39a6-55b7-b952-bf5ab0dcf230.html?fbclid=IwAR2icRW\\_tf5fuu88M9POdESRnssHmoDs9WBdgDYcM08KuuYyo2PIFWXgoyc](https://www.swnewsmedia.com/prior_lake_american/news/prior-lake-high-school-graduate-puts-on-christmas-dance-production/article_efc759c0-39a6-55b7-b952-bf5ab0dcf230.html?fbclid=IwAR2icRW_tf5fuu88M9POdESRnssHmoDs9WBdgDYcM08KuuYyo2PIFWXgoyc)



The 2017 "CHILL" dance production, featuring half the soundtrack from "A Charlie Brown Christmas"





The 2017 “CHILL” dance production, featuring half the soundtrack from “A Charlie Brown Christmas.”

For the second year in a row, Prior Lake High School graduate Errin Liebhard will bring jazz, dance and “A Charlie Brown Christmas” to the Amsterdam Bar & Hall in St. Paul with the “CHILL” dance production. CHILL will be at Amsterdam Bar & Hall on 6th and Wabasha Street in St. Paul Dec. 14 to Dec. 16.

“It’s going to be a real good time,” Liebhard said. “People are always interested in finding holiday options that are different from the norm. I hope some of the good people of Prior Lake will make the pilgrimage.”

After she graduated from college, Liebhard helped found “Rhythmically Speaking,” an organization which puts on annual shows highlighting various choreographers who specialize in jazz and American social dance. The Rhythmically Speaking show is in the summer, so Liebhard began to focus producing and choreographing her own show in the fall or winter.

Enter: “A Charlie Brown Christmas.”

“When I was younger, I couldn’t put my finger on why I liked the music from Charlie Brown,” Liebhard said. “I’ve come to recognize that the music and the soundtrack, the reason it’s timeless and nostalgic is it’s not afraid to be melancholy, and it’s lighthearted but still rooted in reality.”

“A Charlie Brown Christmas” premiered on television in December 1965. Due to its jazz soundtrack, absence of a laugh track and other factors such as child actors providing the voices, it was assumed the movie would be a failure, according to USA Today.

It wasn’t.

Millions of viewers tuned in the first year and every year since to watch Charlie Brown attempt to discover the true meaning of Christmas despite his depression surrounding the season.

“The music has these minor tones and times where it kind of feels sad and joyful at the same time, just like Charlie Brown,” Liebhard said. “The music is what makes it timeless.”

Though Liebhard had dreamed of doing a dance production set to the music from “A Charlie Brown Christmas” almost 10 years ago, the idea came to fruition for the first time in 2017 with dancers performing to half the “A Charlie Brown Christmas” soundtrack in “CHILL.”

“I saw the production last year, which was really great coming into it and then stepping in as a dancer, being in on both the audience side and now on the performance side of it,” CHILL dancer Kathleen Pender said. “There’s really something in it for everybody, whether it’s the connection to watching ‘A Charlie Brown Christmas’ over the years or the connection to dance or the connection to music.”

In 2018, the performers will dance to the full soundtrack, performed — as in 2017 — by a live band.

“There’s a melancholy to it that’s unique in Christmas music,” band leader Greg Schaefer said. “Christmas can be a little bit melancholy for a variety of reasons. It’s a joyous and melancholy time, and music captures that perfectly.”

While dancers performing to live music is unusual in itself, there is another unique aspect to “CHILL” — in addition to the choreographed and sequenced parts of the show, dancers are asked to improvise if the mood strikes.

“Everyone is encouraged to have their own spark and have these improvisation solo and duet moments,” CHILL dancer Cristina Tolson said. “We are really given the opportunity to feel the music and go with it.” With the improvisation on both ends, there comes a need to collaborate, said Bob DeBoer, who plays trumpet in the band.

“A lot of times if I’m playing, I’m more worried about listening and I’ll close my eyes,” DeBoer said. “If I want to work with dancers and watch them, it’s the whole idea of can I get a musical idea from the motion of the dancer. It’s the cross collaboration of different disciplines.”

The idea of improvisation in dance is unique, Liebhard said. “When people go out dancing socially, they don’t think about this, but they make up moves as they go,” Liebhard said. “It’s not super common to see that on stage for a dance show or a concert dance show.

The show will be at 7 p.m. on Dec. 14, 2 p.m. on Dec. 15 and 5 p.m. on Dec. 16. Tickets are available on [ticketfly.org](https://www.ticketfly.org) for \$16 or at the door for \$18.



## Best of the Week: British Arrows Awards, Atmosphere, Sheila E

DECEMBER 8, 2018 — 12:28AM

LINK: <http://www.startribune.com/best-of-the-week-british-arrows-awards-atmosphere-sheila-e/502106871/>

8 p.m. Wed. First Avenue, Mpls. \$45-\$150, [etix.com](http://etix.com).

Twin Cities-based Rhythmically Speaking stages its second annual evening of dance set to Vince Guaraldi's "Charlie Brown Christmas" soundtrack.

Accompanied by local surf-jazz quartet GST, this year's show was expanded from last year's premiere. Choreographer Erinn Liebhard's playful choreography offers up cheery, lighthearted holiday fare. Then again, there are some seriously skillful moves.

Sheila Regan

7 p.m. Fri., 2 p.m. Sat., 5 p.m. next Sun. Amsterdam Bar & Hall, St. Paul. \$16-\$18, [amsterdambarandhall.com](http://amsterdambarandhall.com).



# Minnesota

Monthly

## "A Charlie Brown Christmas" Gets Full Choreo at a St. Paul Bar

Think: jazzy, dorky, with some Charles Schulz melancholy—to the full soundtrack

BY ERIK TORMOEN

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LINK: [http://www.minnesotamonthly.com/Arts-and-Entertainment/A-Charlie-Brown-Christmas-Gets-Full-Choreo/?fbclid=IwAR1sTdeJIL8l-1vUnH3gluf8wNGMZ8A9\\_O8Qj7C-PgX73iwRd9MbogMOd0w](http://www.minnesotamonthly.com/Arts-and-Entertainment/A-Charlie-Brown-Christmas-Gets-Full-Choreo/?fbclid=IwAR1sTdeJIL8l-1vUnH3gluf8wNGMZ8A9_O8Qj7C-PgX73iwRd9MbogMOd0w)



PHOTO BY JILLIAN BELL

Every good holiday songbook has tunes from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. San Francisco jazz composer Vince Guaraldi's melodic proto-Muzak revolutionized easy listening, and the songs he contributed to the *Peanuts* Christmas special became his most recognizable. The best-known plays over a scene of Charles Schulz' **big-headed kids dancing in dorky, self-possessed ways onstage**. You've heard it if you've stepped foot in a mall early winter (even if you don't realize it's called "Linus and Lucy"). But can you clap along?

The syncopation might throw you off; the *Peanuts* characters don't even jig entirely on beat. Guaraldi's soundtrack has inspired lighthearted, "jazzy" ballet on the East Coast, but it took Erinn Liebhard, artistic director of St. Paul-based dance company Rhythmically Speaking, to embody those slinky, swinging grooves. She performs and choreographs vernacular dance, which grew up in American bars, clubs, and other public spaces of unabashed bopping (as did Liebhard, the child of a Twin Cities rock musician father). It's where swing, jazz, and tap dance came from. Liebhard loved *A Charlie Brown Christmas* as a kid, and today she realizes why: "When I close my eyes and hear this music, I've always just seen dance."

Last winter, at the kid- and beer-friendly setting of Amsterdam Bar & Hall in St. Paul, Liebhard's concert *Chill* (named for the laid-back vibes of both the music and the venue) tasked a clutch of dancers with improvising moves to four songs from the soundtrack. The dancers dressed in bright solids, and Liebhard took her cue from the hair-whipping *Peanuts* girl in purple. "My mom and I would always do that little dance when we watched the movie, so we were the purple twins."

As for the sphinx-like beat counting: “As long as the rhythm in your feet is correct, you get to make choices in your upper body, in your head and your ribs, as to how it works.” This is actually something Liebhard focuses on in her dance career generally. “Learning to understand rhythm well enough to share a pattern but not to sterilize it—that’s a special skill.”

Her organization [Rhythmically Speaking](#) produces the show, and the idiosyncrasies that amicably coexist in that rug-cutting scene get at the nonprofit’s mission pretty well. For 10 years, Rhythmically Speaking has worked with local and national artists to transplant vernacular dance from its bright, commercial, Broadway greenhouse to its original soil—in easygoing communal venues, reconnected to the diversity that spawned it, and prioritizing improv and dancers’ uniqueness over synchronicity.

For *Chill 2.0*, Liebhard invited eight dancers to her house for chips and salsa, cocoa, and a viewing of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, to listen to Guaraldi’s songs—often wistful (“[Christmas Time Is Here](#)”), mellow, (the arrangement of “[O Tannenbaum](#)”), and innocent (“[Hark, the Herald Angels Sing](#)”). She asked them to write down feelings that swirl around the holidays. Charlie Brown’s central conflict is that he can’t figure this out. The dancers wrote: “I wish I were closer to my family,” “curling up on the couch and smelling the Christmas cookies my mom is making and wishing for that innocence and lack of responsibility that came with childhood.” “A lot of nostalgia,” Liebhard says. “The season asks for so much human connection, so it causes a multitude of feelings.” Part of what made Charles Schulz identifiably Minnesotan (St. Paul, represent) was Charlie Brown’s ever-suffered [melancholy](#). Around the holidays, you might catch up with old friends, miss lost family members, and lament failed relationships all at once.

Local jazz quartet GST plays the soundtrack's eight major songs chronologically, and projections of the cartoon, paired with lines read aloud—by Liebhard's musician husband as well as by the 10-year-old daughter of GST's guitarist—will remind audiences of the surprisingly mature storyline. But it's really about the way movements, half choreographed and half improvised, can capture Guaraldi's enduring music, *Charlie Brown*.

“My excitement doing nearly the entire soundtrack this time around is to shift through all of those moods,” Liebhard says, “and allow people to do the same.”

***Chill 2.0*** December 14-16 Ages 12 and under are free; adults pay \$16 in advance, \$18 at the door Amsterdam Bar & Hall, 6 W. Sixth St., St. Paul



## Art Hounds: Fine pottery at The

# Phipps Arts & Culture

Marianne Combs · Dec 13, 2018

LISTEN Story audio 4min 18sec

LINK: [https://www.mprnews.org/story/2018/12/13/art-hounds-fine-pottery-the-hipps?fbclid=IwAR2J-b3VoDWDBbHGuY7sBY-KmYqnkserCDeDVvQG8lAZ\\_rytGcyFLeXaT9Q](https://www.mprnews.org/story/2018/12/13/art-hounds-fine-pottery-the-hipps?fbclid=IwAR2J-b3VoDWDBbHGuY7sBY-KmYqnkserCDeDVvQG8lAZ_rytGcyFLeXaT9Q)

Heather Rutledge, executive director of Art Reach St. Croix, is used to seeing Will Swanson's and Janel Jacobson's pottery at their home in Sunrise when they open it up each year for the annual St. Croix Valley pottery studio and tour. Now she's looking forward to seeing their work on display in one of the galleries at the Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, Wis. Rutledge appreciates the skill and craft of the husband-wife duo and thinks the gallery setting will highlight the elegant lines of their work. On display in the Overlook Gallery through Jan. 13.

Brenda Nepsund is heading to Rhythmically Speaking's show "Chill" this weekend. It's a dance performance done to the entire soundtrack of "A Charlie Brown Christmas," as performed by local jazz band GST. Performances run Friday through Sunday at the Amsterdam Bar and Hall in St. Paul.

Jennifer Anderson is the director of music at Central Presbyterian Church in downtown St. Paul. She recommends seeing BorderCrosSing and the Minnesota Chorale this weekend as they sing a dual-language version of Handel's "Messiah" with both baroque instruments and Andean traditional instruments. The evening also includes a performance of "Navidad Nuestra" by Ariel Ramirez, which looks at the story of the holy family as refugees. Anderson says there is power in revisiting a familiar story in the context of current events. Performances are Friday at Our Lady of Guadalupe in St. Paul and Saturday at Church of the Ascension in Minneapolis.



# PIONEER PRESS

## TwinCities●com

**Dancers, musicians perform ‘A Charlie Brown Christmas’ jazz songs live — and you can dance along**



Rhythmically Speaking will dance to the music from “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” played by a live jazz band, at Amsterdam Ball and Hall. (Photo by Jillian Bell)

By **LAUREN PAHMEIER** | [lpahmeier@pioneerpress.com](mailto:lpahmeier@pioneerpress.com) |

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St. Paul knows how to celebrate Charlie Brown.

Statues of “Peanuts” characters are scattered around the city, a permanent homage to native son (and creator of Snoopy, Linus and Charlie Brown), Charles Schulz.

And this holiday season, two productions in St. Paul are all about Schulz’s beloved characters from the comics.

This weekend, dance troupe Rhythmically Speaking is moving to the beat of the “Charlie Brown Christmas” soundtrack played live at Amsterdam Bar and Hall in downtown St. Paul. And just up the hill, SteppingStone Theatre for Youth is presenting a more traditional version of the transformation of Charlie Brown’s scraggly tree.

According to Erinn Liebhard — the main choreographer for “CHILL: The Entire ‘Charlie Brown Christmas’ Soundtrack, Played Live and Danced!” — another show in New York has reinterpreted Charlie Brown through ballet and classical music. But for her show, Liebhard and her nonprofit Rhythmically Speaking are celebrating Charlie Brown the way it’s supposed to be: through jazz. Vince Guaraldi’s jazz soundtrack will be interpreted through jazz dance and live music.

“In terms of jazz aesthetic, nobody’s done it before,” Liebhard said. The performances will include text, imagery and voiceovers from “A Charlie Brown Christmas.” Most of the songs from the show’s soundtrack will be incorporated, and dancers will even be pulling direct inspiration from the cartoon characters’ signature moves around Schroeder’s piano.

The songs from the soundtrack will be reproduced live by GST, a local surf-jazz quartet, who will share the stage with the nine dancers for the three performances at Amsterdam Bar and Hall.

“There’s something really amazing about seeing where jazz dance started, which was in bars, where you can have a drink and chill out a little bit and not have to worry about being, you know, prim and proper in the theater,” Liebhard said.



Rhythmically Speaking dancers perform “A Charlie Brown Christmas” at Amsterdam



Bar and Hall in St. Paul. (Photo by Jillian Bell)

As improvisation is an important element of jazz, it's vital for the show, too, she added. Dancers usually perform 100 percent choreographed material, and GST and other jazz bands usually perform mostly improvised material. For this show, they are meeting at the middle. Since half of the show is improvised, no show will be exactly the same. "When you know that people are improvising — they're making something up in the moment — that means that if you're there with them, you're there in the moment with them, too."

Liebhard has had the idea for this show for nearly a decade. She and Rhythmically Speaking put on a version of this show last year just with half of the songs. This year, they're doing all but two songs from the "Charlie Brown Christmas" soundtrack.

Liebhard wants to remind audience members to slow down around the holidays.

"Forget everything that you might be worrying about — including Christmas-related things like shopping, and whatever else might distract you from really enjoying your time as a human. And that to me is the most important purpose of dance, of making and performing dance."

Children are encouraged to come to the family-oriented show; kids 12 and younger get in free.

**CHILL: The Entire 'Charlie Brown Christmas' Soundtrack, Played Live and Danced!**

- **When:** 7 p.m. Friday, 2 p.m. Saturday, 5 p.m. Sunday
  - **Where:** Amsterdam Bar and Hall, 6 W. Sixth St., St. Paul
- Tickets:** \$18-\$16, 12 and younger get in free; [ticketfly.com](https://www.ticketfly.com); [rhythmicallyspeakingdance.org](https://rhythmicallyspeakingdance.org)



## BWW Review: Jazz & Peanuts Inspired CHILL in Saint Paul

by Karen Bovard Dec. 21, 2018





There are lots of holiday offerings in the performance-rich Twin Cities. One of the new ones this year was CHILL, an hour-long danced-through performance to the famous score of the CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS television special, played live by a small jazz combo sharing the stage with the ensemble of 9 dancers. Colorful, infectious, and accessible, the performance played to sell out crowds, including many rapt children, over a recent weekend in a downtown Saint Paul bar.

The creative mind and kinetic body behind this happy endeavor is Erinn Liebhard, a choreographer and dancer based in the Twin Cities. In an interview with BWW, she said she's been haunted by Vince Guaraldi's music for a full decade, and drawn to the themes of "kindness, presence, melancholy, and nostalgia" so palpable in it. Last year at this time, she put up about half the work, but this was the first time CHILL was presented in its entirety.

The cartoonist Charles Schulz who created the Peanuts comic strip lived and worked in Saint Paul. Bulbous sculptures of his famous characters (Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Lucy, Schroeder, etc.) dot a couple of parks and plazas within blocks of the Amsterdam Hall and Bar where the performance happened. Fittingly, CHILL was supported by a Cultural Star matching grant from the City of Saint Paul. Liebhard applied in July, and knew she'd been recommended for funding, but didn't get official confirmation that the money had been disbursed until the day the project debuted. She was able to pay the dancers at industry standard thanks to this grant.

Liebhard's aesthetic centers around improvisation, social interaction, and groove, by which she means "a uniquely human ability to track rhythm and organize movement around a metric pulse." Holder of both undergraduate and master's degrees in dance, her work centers on American vernacular and social dance, including especially the African-American influences. She's trained in many styles, from clogging to capoeira. She prefers performing in social spaces ("where people can drink beer!") to more formal theaters. She comes alive to "syncopation and musicality" and likes the description of jazz as "serious fun." To her, playfulness has artistic value.

Accordingly, about 50% of CHILL was improvised, both on the parts of the dancers and the musicians, though there were strict agreements made in their two joint rehearsals about length of solos and transitions. To my eye, the

integration of improvisation with set choreography was quite seamless. In working with the dancers, Liebhard (who also danced in the show) stressed the importance of embracing the moment and celebrating the individuality of each performer. Each dancer was dressed in contemporary clothes, with a different solid color for each person. Not interested in narrative per se, Liebhard crafted a show where the dances did not portray specific characters but instead endeavored to embody the spirit of the music as it unrolled in real time. Spare use of an occasional projected image and voiceover provided just enough linkage to the story told in the iconic TV special.

Onstage live music was provided by the local ensemble GST, who call themselves a "jazz jam band." Trumpeter Bob DeBoer has an exceptionally mellow tone, not at all brassy. Greg Schaefer provided some of the melodic lines on lead guitar, trading off with DeBoer and Tony Watercott on bass guitar, while Danny Sigelman on drums provided the all-important pulse. The four musicians made only sparing use of charts: clearly, they are skilled improvisers and collaborators.

Liebhard has been making original work for a little over a decade; she's the guiding spirit behind Rhythmically Speaking Dance, which currently works to mount two full shows a year. The summer show showcases work by a handful of choreographers. Next November, Liebhard will present a new show featuring her own choreography, supported by a Metropolitan Regional Arts Council Next Step grant, a highly competitive honor she secured only on her fourth application. Persistence and longevity matter. I look forward to what she invents.

Photo credit: Jillian Bell