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The Low/High Life

Like toasting with **Champagne** over greasy Chinese takeout, life is best enjoyed as a mix of the **indulgent** and the **budget**. A night out in Portland is no different.

BY MADISON ANDREWS

“PEOPLE DO END UP in their underwear,” Brian Allen says. Allen is the artistic director for **Good Theater** on Munjoy Hill. The theater’s upcoming play, *A Comedy of Tenors*, runs through April 29. “It’s a madcap comedy, with mistaken identity and door-slaming and lunacy. Written by Ken Ludwig, the story is set in Paris in the 1930s. Performed by a modest cast of seven, *A Comedy of Tenors* explores the explosive dynamic between “a producer, an aging Italian superstar, and his hot-blooded wife.”

I dress for the show with Paris in mind. A mid-length, deep blue number does the trick. April in Maine is fickle, so I throw on

a dusty, cinched trench coat. This cosmopolitan occasion calls for heels, too.

Now in its sixteenth year, Good Theater is a cozy playhouse in the St. Lawrence Arts Center at 76 Congress Street. “It’s a terrific venue, very comfortable,” says Allen. “And our prices are moderate.” A Saturday evening show of *A Comedy of Tenors* runs \$32.

A friend and I meet up in front of the theater and decide to skip dinner in favor of a drink during the performance. “People get to drink while they watch our shows,” Allen says. “We have a really good time. We’re really funny! And we all need to laugh these days.”

Once the stage empties and the lights

flicker back on, the customary post-show nightcap is next on our agenda. No need to call a cab if **Munjoy Hill Tavern** is the destination. A six-minute walk southwest on Congress Street takes us straight to the watering hole.

If Good Theater had us strolling through Paris, Munjoy Hill Tavern steers us back to American soil. A glance at the decor reveals a glowing Pabst Blue Ribbon clock and a large whiteboard advertising Jell-O shots.

“There’s a game on at the Cross Center,” my companion says. He rolls up his sleeves as he orders us both a Miller Lite, discounted to \$2 each on game days.

“We’re usually the last stop for people as

PORTLAND AFTER DARK

they come back up the hill,” Kate, the bartender, says. “We’re open until 1 a.m., later than most places up here.”

The real game-changer at this joint proves to be the myriad of late-night snacks. It’s tough to settle for just one, so we order mozzarella sticks, jalapeno poppers, and onion rings, Paris now a fond but faint memory.

OPERA AND DARTS IN THE OLD PORT

After another Saturday night spent drinking cheap beer at my regular dive, I’m craving something more refined, **Portland Symphony Orchestra**. Imagining myself among the soft red seats and arching golden ceiling at Merrill Auditorium, I dress to the nines. Tonight, we travel to *The Blue Danube*.

A glass of champagne keeps us warm as we make the two-minute walk from Petite Jacqueline to the auditorium. With longtime music director Robert Moody stepping down at the end of the 2017-18 season, attending Portland Symphony Orchestra concerts is very much an interactive spectator sport, as audience members have the opportunity to help name his successor.

“We’ve had a lot of people asking who it’s going to be,” says Elle Sleeper of PSO. “As of now, there’s no clear front runner.”

Tonight’s director, Eckard Preu, is a finalist. Another, Daniel Meyer, will direct the highly-anticipated “Rodgers & Hammerstein on Broadway” on April 21, which features showstoppers from *The Sound of Music*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Oklahoma!* The demand for Broadway music in Portland is high. “It’s so popular that we have another Broadway-themed concert scheduled” for next season, Sleeper says.

After the show, we buzz with energy. With my heels wedging between cobblestones, I’m relieved when we stumble upon a familiar favorite. At **Rosie’s**, a tall Miller High Life is \$1.50, popcorn is flowing and free, and—at least tonight—there’s no wait to play darts. Music to my ears.

“We should get tickets for the Broadway thing,” I say, dart in hand, aiming for the bullseye. I throw and miss.

From up in the stars to down-to-earth. I won’t soon forget the brilliance of what we’ve witnessed at Merrill Au-



ditorium, but this—the sticky bar, sound of darts, popcorn-littered floor—feels like coming home.

COCKTAILS AND CASH BARS ON THE WEST END

We’re at **Top of the East**, standing by the floor-to-ceiling windows and gazing over our glittering city. Someone at the table near to us receives an order of lobster sliders (with lemon herb aioli, \$17), and we immediately follow suit.

“This is amazing,” my friend says of his Mexican Stand-Off, an expert mix of tequila, agave, lime, and pineapple juice (\$14). He takes another sip and makes a pained expression—it’s so good it hurts. “Yeah, it’s incredible.”

I ignore him and concentrate on my

drink, a Ye Olde Fashioned (\$14). I knew I’d made the right call when I watched our “mixologist” add a flamed orange peel to the glass.

A hot-spot for celebrations of any kind, Top of the East offers us panoramas of the shimmering skyline from the apex of the Eastland Hotel, built in 1927. The legendary bar and lounge pairs showstopper views with Instagram-approved cocktails and small plates.

The higher you are, the greater the fall. Slightly buzzed and tremendously broke, we saunter off the elevator and into the street.

I can’t fathom swiping my credit card again for the foreseeable future, so a cash-only place hits the spot. **Pizza Villa** near the Greyhound bus station is designed to give you the bang for your buck. We elude





A performance at the Good Theater followed by beer and jalapeño poppers at Munjoy Hill Tavern is just the right mix of glamour and grunge.

the bar and slide into a booth by the windows underneath a rosy neon sign. Here, we don't need menus. Fifteen dollars has us eating (pizza) and drinking (a pitcher of frothy beer) like kings.

SEAFOOD & SHIPYARD DRAFTS ON FOREST AVENUE

Woodford Food & Beverage mixes trends with nostalgia. The airy, brightly lit space is grounded by moody green booths and glossy tabletops. I admire shiny glass wine carafes, black leather barstools, a golden deer's head atop a cocktail shaker, and each painstakingly plated dish.

On our tabletop is a heaping pile of mussels, gleaming with butter and steam (the Casco Bay Mussels and Fries (\$16) is listed as a "House Favorite").

Fortified, we drive five minutes further along Forest Avenue. In pursuit of one last drink before we call it a night, we spontaneously hit the brakes and enter **Samuel's Bar and Grill**.

Samuel's is unassuming from an outside glimpse. We're intrigued by its sign—a dog snout-deep in a mug of beer—so we venture inside. It's Tuesday, which means Shipyard drafts are half-price. Dimly lit, crowded, and full of beer-sponsored paraphernalia, Samuel's is a dive's dive.

"Another one?" I ask, settling in for the night. ■

FROM TOP: STEPHEN UNDERWOOD - GOOD THEATER; COURTESY PHOTOS

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