

A & E

How do you keep them coming after Highway 40 closes?

Hors d'oeuvres, black rhinos & free beer with Mozart.

By Sarah Bryan Miller
POST-DISPATCH CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

Cultural organizations clustered in the city's central corridor — from the Zoo to the Symphony to the Black Rep — stand to lose a lot if their patrons are so worried about the temporary closing and reconstruction of Highway 40 (Interstate 64) that they stay home.

So most are ramping up plans for getting the word to their audiences that, yes, you can get here from there, and showing them how. Some even are planning special events to try to offset the effects of the expected snarls.

GRAND CENTER

"It's frightening," said Rudy Nickens, executive director of the Black Rep. "I don't know what to expect. I'm always the optimist, but I will admit to being a little nervous."

In the first phase of the road project starting Jan. 2, five miles of Highway 40 will be closed between Ballas Road and Interstate 170. When that work is done, lanes from I-170 to Kingshighway will be closed until late 2009.

The Black Rep performs at the Grandel Theatre in Grand Center. Its season will start in January, right after the scheduled closure, and run through early July.

"We're just counting on people deciding that they're going to go out and just be a little inconvenienced ... Please!" Nickens said.

Some people have recalled the apprehension over Pope John Paul II's visit in January 1999, when huge crowds and traffic gridlock were predicted but never materialized. Some are hopeful that the highway closing won't amount to much, even as they acknowledged that St. Louisans tend to fret a lot about traffic.

Virtually all organizations are trying to improve communications with their patrons. They're publishing maps and travel tips on their websites, in print ads, and in direct mailings and e-mails to members.

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TRAVEL TIPS FOR EVENTS IN GRAND CENTER AND FOREST PARK

- Call and plan ahead.
- Buy tickets in advance online.
- Allow yourself an extra half-hour for traffic jams.
- Consult the organization's website for alternate routes, shuttle buses and special events at off-peak times.
- Go to stltoday.com/traffic to plan the best routes to a variety of locations, to receive traffic alerts by e-mail or cell phone and to view instant updates on traffic conditions.

VENUE LOCATIONS

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

718 North Grand Boulevard
slo.org
Distance from Highway 40: 0.65 miles

FOX THEATRE

527 North Grand Boulevard
fabulousfox.com
Distance from Highway 40: 0.51 mile

GRANDEL THEATRE

3610 Grandel Square
Home of the Rep's Off-Ramp series, the Black Rep and other performing-arts series
Distance from Highway 40: 0.66 mile

THE SHELDON CONCERT HALL

3648 Washington Boulevard
sheldonconcerthall.org
Distance from Highway 40: 0.63 mile

EDISON THEATRE

Washington University,
6445 Forsyth Boulevard
edisontheatre.wustl.edu
Distance from Highway 40: 1.6 miles

THE MUNY

Forest Park
muny.com
Distance from Highway 40: 1.35 miles

Illustration by Brian Williamson | Post-Dispatch

ON TELEVISION • GAIL PENNINGTON

Writers strike stalls career of struggling St. Louis native

Christian Trokey is a writer. The 1995 graduate of Francis Howell North High School finished film school in Chicago seven years ago and headed for Hollywood, where he pounded the pavement with two goals: "To get my foot in the door, and also to get a paycheck — so I could survive."

It was tough. "I had a couple of near opportunities, near misses," he said. One TV drama

was canceled before he could write his first word. He lived off what he describes as "fuzzy credit-card math."

Three years ago, Trokey took a job as an assistant to the creator of Fox's "Prison Break." An assistant gets a lot of coffee and makes a lot of copies, but his foot was in the door. During the second season, he made it into the writers room, as

their assistant. He took a lot of notes, fetched a lot of coffee.

Last spring, all that schlepping paid off. Trokey broke through as a writer for the third season of "Prison Break." His first episode with a "written by" credit airs Monday.

But Trokey won't do much celebrating that day. As a member of the striking Writers Guild of America, he'll be carrying a picket sign, wearing a red shirt and walking a four-hour shift with fellow scribes.

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Actors (from left) John Stamos, Maura Tierney and Mekhi Phifer picket Tuesday at Warner Bros. in Los Angeles. The Associated Press

