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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

All-Night Philosophy Is One of the Attractions in Cultural Marathon Trend

Some New York organizations are offering long-form events that provide full immersion in a subject or individual artist's work



1 of 5

By **CHARLES PASSY**

Updated Jan. 26, 2017 9:27 p.m. ET

Call it the super-size approach to the arts.

New York cultural organizations are embracing marathon programming, as in events that can last five to 12 hours, or even longer. The goal is to give audiences an opportunity to fully immerse themselves in a subject or individual artist's work.

The events offer an endurance test: New Yorkers may love their culture, but how far are they willing to go to prove it?



The Brooklyn Public Library's main branch this weekend is doing a 12-hour all-night marathon in partnership with the French Embassy's cultural-services department. "A Night of Philosophy and Ideas" starts at 7 p.m. Saturday.

The free event will feature everything from a discussion on the future of democracy to appearances by the Trisha Brown Dance Company. There will be sleeping stations, free coffee and even a pick-me-up yoga session at 1 a.m.

Brooklyn Public Library Cultural Curator Jakab Orsos said the event is all about embracing “a different pace.” While the library could have organized a series of two-hour events about philosophy, he believes ideas resonate in a marathon forum where the audience has ample time for reflection.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage, located in Lower Manhattan, is staging a multi-hour reading this Sunday of Nobel Prize-winning author’s Elie Wiesel’s Holocaust memoir “Night.”

The free event, with readers including actor Joel Grey, violinist Itzhak Perlman and New York City Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña, will take place during the afternoon and evening, with no sleeping stations needed. But Michael Glickman, the museum’s director, says that shouldn’t lessen its impact.

“There is something powerful about a marathon event,” he said.

Such cultural marathons aren’t entirely new to the New York scene. For 43 years, The Poetry Project, a city-based organization devoted to the art form, has been holding a New Year’s Day event at the East Village’s St. Mark’s Church In-the-Bowery with readings and music and dance performances. The 2017 edition ran nearly 11 hours and attracted an audience of 1,000-plus.

Another presenter embracing the “more is more” approach is Symphony Space. Since 1978, the Upper West Side hall has offered “Wall to Wall” events, typically themed around a legendary musical artist. Coming up on April 30: a six-and-half-hour “Wall to Wall Steve Reich,” celebrating the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer.

Arts-industry insiders say it is no surprise that marathon events are becoming more of a staple in New York, if not nationwide. Some point to the rise of television binge-watching as helping cement the trend.

Long events don’t appeal to all audiences. Some art presenters say there are those who simply refuse to commit to being in a theater or concert hall for more than two or three hours at a time.

And when an event stretches beyond a certain length, all sorts of mistakes and mishaps are possible. During the performance artist Taylor Mac’s 24-hour concert of American popular music, staged last October at St. Ann’s Warehouse in Brooklyn, the air-conditioning stopped working for a brief spell.

Both audience and artist took it as part of the event’s rollicking ride. Most of the 650 in attendance, who paid up to \$400 a ticket, stayed through to the very end.

Among them was Kevin McDonald, a 26-year-old Taylor Mac fan who traveled from his Maryland home for the performance. “I have never run a marathon, but I think I did the emotional equivalent,” he said.

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