

# Rochester—City of Festivals

By Joel Seligman

RICHARD FLORIDA, A POPULAR STUDENT OF American culture, recently characterized Rochester as one of the nation's 10 leading cities for music in a survey he published in *The Atlantic Cities*. Florida explained: "Rochester might seem a surprise in ninth place. But the city has long had a distinguished symphony and it is home to the Eastman School of Music."

Indeed, Rochester has become a City of Festivals. Consider the last few months. We celebrated the Memorial Art Gallery's Clothesline Festival, the Corn Hill Arts Festival, and the Park Avenue Summer Art Festival. Film aficionados can take in the High Falls Film Festival and the Rochester International Film Festival. Music buffs delight in the East End Music Festival and the highly acclaimed Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival, which last summer attracted more than 187,000 people from 30-plus states and 15 countries.

In September, the inaugural First Niagara Rochester Fringe Festival further fortified Rochester on the nation's cultural map. Produced by alumna Erica Fee '98, the festival drew more than 33,000 people over five days, to a potpourri of nearly 200 performing attractions in 21 venues throughout downtown Rochester. The University was proud to host many of the festival's performances in Eastman Theatre and on Gibbs Street, many of which featured our students, faculty, and staff. Planning is under way for Fringe Festival 2013.

We are unusual among United States universities in not having a typical homecoming weekend, but instead having our own intellectual feast, Meliora Weekend, which provided another stellar celebration this year.

Distinguished journalist Barbara Walters delivered a memorable keynote address to a sold-out audience at Eastman Theatre's Kodak Hall. In comments marked by her charm, humor, and candor, Walters shared how she began her career in broadcasting and talked about where she believes journalism is headed.

The George Eastman Circle welcomed



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award-winning journalist Jim Lehrer, who has served as moderator of a dozen televised presidential debates, including this year's first presidential debate on October 3. Lehrer was fascinating as he gave us an often humorous inside look at presidential debates over the years, including insights into the candidates, debate rules, and election-year politics.

Dean for Humanities and Interdisciplinary Studies Tom DiPiero moderated this year's Presidential Symposium on "The Humanities, Artistic Expression, and the Digital Age: Innovation and Opportunities,"

with Stanley Fish, one of the nation's most celebrated humanities professors; Duke University's Katherine Hayles '77 (PhD), critical theorist and influential scholar of digital humanities, electronic literature, and literature, science, and technology; and Tod Machover, director of MIT's pathbreaking Media Lab and champion of Opera of the Future, which combines 21st-century music and technology.

In another timely discussion, Bradford Berk, CEO of the Medical Center, Steve Goldstein, president and CEO of Strong Memorial and Highland Hospitals, Dennis Whalen, executive vice president of the Healthcare Association of New York State, and Wallace Johnson, director of the Center for Primary Care, analyzed the challenges posed by health care reform.

Arthur Miller '56, '08 (Honorary) focused Miller's Court on "Intercollegiate Athletics—Who Are They Playing For?" as a way to examine big-time college athletics and its societal impact. Former New York Giant Harry Carson and University Athletic Director George VanderZwaag participated in a discussion addressing the educational versus commercial value of college sports, whether some athletes should be compensated for participation beyond the value of a full scholarship, and the role that the NCAA plays in governing college sports.

The opening concert for The Prismatic Debussy, a monthlong celebration of the 150th anniversary of Claude Debussy's birth, highlighted Eastman Weekend. Eastman Weekend also recounted the legacy of the late Rayburn Wright '43E, distinguished faculty member and Eastman alumnus, with an evening of jazz showcasing celebrated Eastman alumni soloists, talented students, and faculty.

When people ask why we live in Rochester, a compelling answer involves our culture. We are a city of extraordinary people who value music, art, great public and private schools, and the life of the mind. Festivals epitomize much of what is special about Rochester. To write that Rochester is a city of festivals is to recognize that Rochester is a city in which our culture, in the broadest sense, matters. **R**