



**THE CRUCIBLE**

An Educational Collaboration of Arts • Industry • Community

[www.thecrucible.org](http://www.thecrucible.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**THE CRUCIBLE'S SEVENTH ANNUAL FIRE ARTS FESTIVAL**  
*Featuring a Fiery Reinterpretation of Homer's Odyssey*

**July 11 to 14, 2007**

From July 11 to 14, The Crucible's Fire Arts Festival celebrates creativity through fire and light with a spectacular open-air exhibition of interactive fire art and the largest collection of outdoor fire sculpture on the West Coast. The centerpiece of the Festival is *The Fire Odyssey*, a modernized theatrical interpretation of Homer's epic poem.

Blending industrial fire theatre with ballet, opera, hip hop, aerial dance, fire performance, and more, *The Fire Odyssey* brings together an amazing cast of dancers and performers to create an epic as Homer never imagined it. Easton Smith, who played Romeo in The Crucible's production of *Romeo & Juliet—A Fire Ballet*, returns as Odysseus; opera singer Aimee Puentes sings the role of Penelope. Mongolian contortionist Serchmaa Byamba plays Circe; members of the renowned hip-hop troupe Flavor Group play Odysseus' men. Members of the Neykia, a dance troupe noted for combining elements of belly dance, burlesque, Latin dance, and fire performance, play the Sirens. The Cyclops is puppeteer Jonathan Youtt, dressed in a monstrous puppet suit with a single flaming eye. The acrobatic team of Realis, made up of gold medalists and world champion gymnasts Shenea Booth and Arthur Davis, performs the production's amazing finale, with live music provided by Mark Growden and a handpicked ensemble.

Currently, construction is underway in The Crucible's Fire Arts Arena, located in the lot at the corner of Kirkham Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street in Oakland. Riders on BART stare down at the scaffolding that forms the main stage as they ride past, wondering what's going on here in West Oakland. A 35-foot-tall welded sculpture of Athena, created by Dan Das Mann & Karen Cusolito, stands in the lot, reaching toward the sky. Over the next three weeks, a crane will lift and place three more enormous welded sculptures of Greek gods. These giant figures will interact with performers during *The Fire Odyssey*: Poseidon, connected to an Oakland Fire Department pumper truck, will send sea storms across the 8,000 gallons of water in the moat that surrounds the stage; Aeolus controls the winds, sending steam-filled gales to bedevil Odysseus and his men; Zeus shoots white hot lightning bolts from his tesla coil, while Athena has fire at her command. The stage is equipped with 2,000 gallons of propane fire effects.

The Fire Odyssey and the Fire Arts Festival that surrounds it are a production of The Crucible, an Oakland-based art center and school of industrial arts and fire-related education. Directed by Michael Sturtz, The Crucible has eight years of experience in successfully bringing together disparate art forms and artists to create unexpected and unique collaborations. Past efforts have included two Fire Operas, with artists from the San Francisco Opera and the Oakland East Bay Symphony, and a Fire Ballet. The most recent of these, *Romeo & Juliet—A Fire Ballet* presented in January 2007, combined ballet, hip hop, aerial dance, fire performance, and the industrial arts of bronze casting, blacksmithing, and glass flameworking in a production that earned accolades from reviewers at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Oakland Tribune*, San Francisco's *Examiner* (which called it "a true night of fire and passion that inspired both lovers and pyromaniacs"), and *Dance View Times* (which

dubbed it a “roaringly successful and theatrically convincing interpretation”). Building on the success of The Crucible’s earlier productions, *The Fire Odyssey* brings together unlikely partners to make a whole that is much greater than the sum of the parts.

*The Fire Odyssey* itself is also part of a greater whole—taking place in the heart of The Crucible’s Fire Arts Festival. Surrounding *The Fire Odyssey* stage is an eye-popping assortment of interactive fire sculpture and art. This is not art that you quietly admire. This is art that invites (and sometimes requires) you to become a part of the event. Michael Christian’s IT, a forty-foot tall, spider-like structure reminiscent of the alien monsters in *War of the Worlds*, offers an opportunity to climb above the crowd. The *Serpent Mother*, a 168' long, interactive sculpture of a skeletal serpent created by the Flaming Lotus Girls, sends jets of flame aloft from the 41 flame-throwers that erupt from the top of her vertebrae. Twenty feet above the crowd, the great snake’s head and jaws move in response to audience-operated controls. *Dance Dance Immolation*, a fire-lover’s adaptation of the popular arcade video game, *Dance Dance Revolution*, invites you to don a flame-proof suit and try the game. Miss a step, and you’ll be (safely) blasted with fire.

The Fire Arts Festival runs from 8PM to 12:30 AM on July 11 to 14 in The Crucible’s Fire Arts Arena at Kirkham Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street in Oakland. Tickets are \$40 on July 11 & 12 and \$45 on July 13 & 14, with a \$5 discount for purchases made before July 1. For Crucible members, tickets are \$30 on July 11 & 12 and \$35 on July 13 & 14. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.thecrucible.org](http://www.thecrucible.org). We recommend advance purchase of tickets; events at The Crucible often sell out.

In conjunction with the Fire Arts Festival, on July 14 from 6 to 9:30 PM, The Crucible is holding a special benefit fundraiser: The Crucible’s Fire & Light Art Auction Soirée. Donors attending this fundraiser will enjoy fine wines and fiery appetizers, dine among flaming sculptures while aerial dancers perform overhead, bid on extraordinary art at the annual art auction, and enjoy reserved seating for the 10 PM performance of *The Fire Odyssey*. This benefit dinner will be held at The Crucible, 1260 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Oakland. Tickets for the Soirée are \$250 per person, and can be purchased online at [www.thecrucible.org](http://www.thecrucible.org) or by phone at 510-444-0919.

As part of the Fire Arts Festival, The Crucible also offers workshops in the industrial and fire arts that are needed to create the inspiring work featured at the Festival, including welding, blacksmithing, glassworking, fire performance, metal casting, and other arts.

Proceeds from the Fire Arts Festival help support The Crucible’s youth & adult art education programs.

### **About The Crucible**

The Crucible is a non-profit arts education center that fosters a collaboration of arts, industry, and community by teaching and showcasing fire, metal, glass and light art. Founded in 1999, The Crucible currently offers more than 400 classes to over 3,000 students annually in everything from bronze casting to neon, welding to glass working, blacksmithing to fire dancing. Dedicated to the creative use of fire and light, The Crucible is known for its innovative and stunning public events and fundraisers, uniting artists from diverse disciplines. For more information, visit <http://www.thecrucible.org>.

### **For calendar editors:**

#### **When (Dates & Times):**

Fire Arts Festival: July 11 to 14, 8 PM to 12:30 AM each night

The Fire Odyssey: July 11 to 14, beginning at 10 PM each night

Fire & Light Soiree (a benefit dinner & auction): July 14; 6 PM to 9:30 PM, followed by

performance of *The Fire Odyssey* at 10 PM

**Ticket Prices:**

Tickets are \$40 on July 11 & 12 and \$45 on July 13 & 14, with a \$5 discount for purchases made before July 1. For Crucible members, tickets are \$30 on July 11 & 12 and \$35 on July 13 & 14. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.thecrucible.org](http://www.thecrucible.org). We recommend advance purchase of tickets; events at The Crucible often sell out.

Fire & Light Art Auction Soiree (a benefit dinner & auction): \$250 per person; \$2000 for table of ten.

**What:**

Fire Arts Festival—a display of fire sculpture and installation art

*The Fire Odyssey*—a modernized interpretation of Homer’s epic poem that is the centerpiece of the Festival

Fire & Light Art Auction Soiree—a benefit dinner & auction

**Who:** Designed & Produced by Michael Sturtz of The Crucible, featuring an amazing cast of dancers and performers that reflects the diversity of the Bay Area’s arts community, from classically trained ballet dancers to outrageous fire performers, including The Crucible’s blacksmiths, metal casters, and glassworkers

Event is a fundraiser for by The Crucible.

**Where:** The Crucible’s Fire Arts Arena at Kirkham Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, across from The Crucible, which is located at 1260 7th St., Oakland, CA 94607

**Public info:** 510.444.0919; <http://www.thecrucible.org/fireartsfestival>

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**Photos:** A gallery of photos from past Fire Arts Festivals is online at [www.thecrucible.org/fireartsfestival](http://www.thecrucible.org/fireartsfestival). High resolution photos available on request.