

# fun weekends



By  
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## *Music festival a great time to see Natchez*

I PICKED UP MY friend Joy in Clinton on Saturday, and we rode down the Natchez Trace Parkway in the sunshine.

Soon we were sitting in historic First Presbyterian Church in Natchez, listening to a saxophonist play one of the coolest versions of "A Foggy Day" I've ever heard.

Saturday night was the opening of the festival, which runs through May 25 and features performances of "Kiss Me Kate," "Rigoletto," and "Puttin' On the Ritz," along with tango lessons and even a musical wine tasting.

On Saturday an orchestra and vocalists paid tribute to the late, great George Gershwin, known for such standards as "Someone to Watch Over Me" and "Summertime."

Opera performer Maryann Kyle, a soprano, sang the latter.

That might not make sense if you're an ignorant 20-something like me. I knew the song was part of "Porgy and Bess," but I didn't know "Porgy and Bess" was an opera. I'd only ever heard a high-school choir soloist and an American Idol winner sing "Summertime." It was about time I got educated.

And boy when Kyle sang about that

cotton being high, I could see the fields. I was driving through the delta in my mind. Yep, I understand why it was an opera.

Kyle is a nationally known vocal coach and an associate professor of voice at the University of Southern Mississippi.

All the orchestra members and other vocalists were affiliated with USM too, whether they were teaching, earning post-graduate degrees, or both.

Jay Dean, artistic director of the festival and longtime director of the USM orchestra, introduced all the musicians with their names and where they were (originally) from.

I was impressed with Dean for remembering the countries and cities, and I was impressed with USM for pulling brilliantly talented folks from Cuba, England, Venezuela, and other exotic locales. I'm proud of our universities.

**WHEN YOU GO TO** the festival, see if you can stay at Marcia's Cottages. Some are newly built and some restored, but Marcia has great taste and uses some old materials even in the newer homes.

Also, find Bill and Bobbye Henley. Bobbye is a three-year festival board member and the one who asked me to attend. She and Bill were wonderful hosts, and they even managed to show us all the highlights of Natchez in 25 minutes. They live in Jackson, but they'll be using their weekend place in Natchez a lot this month.

I recommend eating at Magnolia Grill, where you can sit on the screened-in porch and watch the waterfront. Plus the penne pasta with chicken is amazing.

Anyone who's familiar with Natchez knows about Castle, the restaurant at Dunleith Historic Inn. The Henleys took us to the breakfast buffet. Best biscuit I've ever eaten.

So take a look at <http://www.natchezfestivalofmusic.com/> and see if you can make every performance.

Take the Trace all the way to Natchez if you never have, enjoy the beautiful architecture and yummy food, and let your musical tastes expand.

I'm listening to my new Gershwin station on Pandora now.

**Katie Eubanks is a staff writer for the Northside Sun.**

WORTH THE DRIVE