Roman Baratiak sleeps less than he should, but he’s used to it. He’s a culture hound, attending every performance of University of California at Santa Barbara’s Arts & Lectures program unless he’s seen it before. He’s worked for this inspirational series since an undergrad in the 70s, and is now its Associate Director. The job lands him at the confluence of everything important in the arts and current thought, just where he likes to be. But there’s too much going on and it’s not easy. He’s literate on every front: art, dance, music, books, politics, religion. He’s enormously patient, cultivating relations for years before finally snagging a world-famous performer, enabling South Coast audiences to thrive on a cultural diet that far outstrips the norm for a city our size. He sees himself as host, doing airport pickups personally, escorting the famous to their hotel, ensuring all security and logistical demands are met. And after the show, he’ll unwind by perusing publications from around the world. Then he’s back at the office by morning, executing all that’s required to mount a massive number of shows in an equally huge number of venues.

The scope and innovation of Arts & Lectures are legend; this series earned its reputation presenting superstars and brilliant unknowns, contributing to our vibrant cultural scene in a dynamic way. Next year marks its 50th anniversary. Over 33 concerts, dance performances, lectures, and cinema offerings are presented each quarter, at venues ranging from intimate historic homes to the University stadium, Campbell Hall, the Granada, Arlington, and Lobero theaters, and Hahahm Hall. This involves numerous collaborations with other nonprofits. Scheduling content is thoroughly pleasurable for a man with eclectic tastes and curiosity; Roman is passionately committed to the wide spectrum of events, and his bigger dilemma is reducing the number of entries down to what’s most important artistically.

He admires Santa Barbarans for their interest in lifelong learning, noting that dance aficionados cross over to the lecture series, recitals, etc. SB is a book-buying public, highly educated, wealthy, with a tradition of generosity. Which matters, since ticket prices don’t sustain the series or its educational outreach. Underwriting the fee of a prominent speaker, Garrison Keillor or Colin Powell, can cost more than an entire dance company. Fortunately for SB, the Producers’ Circle exists to fill the gap, making feasible bigger risks is in programming. Students, too, have voted for generosity: embedded in their activities fee is support for lower ticket prices for students. On the day of this interview many were lined up patiently to buy tickets to hear the Dalai Lama.

Arts & Lectures also engages a wider audience through its educational outreach, bringing master classes, discussions, demonstrations, and workshops to schools, youth projects, and free public forums. Over 150,000 people attend yearly. And it sponsors new work annually, commissioning an artist to choreograph, compose music, or create a theater piece.

Many of us love living in SB due to the perfect blend of nature, community, and culture. Arts & Lectures is certainly a Top Ten part of it! And Roman Baratiak is at the forefront, the very intersection of entertainment and inspiration.