

Enrica Jang:

Poe Baltimore Executive Director

BY CARYN R. SAGAL



Annual school reading assignments around Halloween led Enrica Jang to an affinity for Edgar Allan Poe — something which ultimately would shape her career.

“Poe invented the detective story. He was the first writer to create a character at the heart of a story whose purpose is to solve a mystery by way of step-by-step reasoning and process — ratiocination,” Jang explains. “Any mystery novel you’ve ever read, any police procedural on television and even cartoons (Scooby Doo!) have a direct line to Poe.

“He wrote about primal emotions and impulses: love, fear, grief, loneliness — universal experiences with permission to explore the darker edge of it all,” she adds. “Every generation feels and

experiences those core things, and is drawn to exploring the dark.”

Noting that Stephen King, Dean Koontz and some of her other favorite authors often mentioned Poe as their inspiration, Jang says she “was steeped in the work.” And it led her to pursue writing, starting in her teens.

“Poe is one of the major inspirations for the genres I was most interested in writing about — horror, mystery and crime,” says Jang, who holds an MFA in Professional Writing from Savannah College of Art and Design and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Rhetoric from U.C. Berkeley.

Jang’s publishing company, Red Stylo Media, debuted with a Poe-inspired graphic novel project which turned into

the anthology *Poe Twisted*. In 2014, Jang published her graphic novel, *The House of Montresor*, a sequel to her favorite Poe work, “The Cask of Amontillado,” with Jason Strutz.

“As an editor, I wanted to work with as many people as possible, so I put out a call to comics folks to pitch me stories inspired by Edgar Allan Poe for a comic anthology,” she explains. “What’s funny is my comic was one of the things that helped me get my current job!”

In 2017, Jang was appointed director of Poe Baltimore, a nonprofit that was created to fund, maintain and interpret the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum and to celebrate the legacy of one of Baltimore’s most famous residents.

“My comic book was already being sold in the museum gift shop and when the director position opened, I was in heaven,” Jang says.

Featuring significant artifacts and exhibits about Poe’s life and death in Baltimore, the Poe residence is a National Historic Landmark and a Literary Landmark that draws nearly 19,000 visitors annually. Jang considers it “a true honor” to oversee such a beloved destination. She most enjoys sharing Poe’s mastery of his craft with its visitors.

“Many people believe that Poe was somehow a victim of his talent. It’s a great pleasure for me to share that he was in fact masterful and intentional about his writing. Emotional, sure, but in command,” she explains. “It opens conversations about the meaning of inspiration and creativity and helps people overcome their hesitation about what is possible for themselves.”

Jang also directs the annual International Edgar Allan Poe Festival & Awards, which honor Poe’s accomplishments and recognize outstanding creative works that are inspired by him or adaptations of his work.

“Taking place Oct. 3 to 5, this year’s festival celebrates the 180th anniversary of the first printing of ‘The Raven,’ with history and gothic/playful

themes throughout our program,” Jang says. “We’re also celebrating the 150th anniversary of Poe’s monument at Westminster Hall with an exhibit about why Poe was buried in the same cemetery three times, how his wife’s bones were moved to his side, and all the weird and strange things that kept happening to Poe even after he died, from smashed headstones to the Poe Toaster!”

October also will mark the opening of an outdoor gallery and exhibit showcasing future site plans. The venue has begun a multiphase, multiyear expansion adding up to 17,000 square feet for ongoing and special exhibits in multiple galleries, an auditorium, reading room, special collections and exhibits, a literary garden, and expanded space for museum operations and gift shop.

“The Poe House today is a scant 620 square feet. People come to Baltimore from all over the world expecting to visit something grand and gothic out

of the House of Usher, and instead they encounter the remnant of this tiny row home,” Jang explains. “We always get the sense people would love more. A place to be close to the writing that inspired them to come here and explore the 200 years of story Poe inspires. Baltimore loves Poe as a city icon.”

Looking ahead, 2026 also will be busy with Poe Baltimore’s commemoration of the America 250 program.

“Most people don’t know that Poe’s grandparents served in the American Revolution and War of 1812, were known to George Washington and were friends to the Marquis de Lafayette. Their service literally made their famous grandson’s career possible,” Jang explains. “We’ve already built an exhibit for the historic Carroll Mansion and we’re planning a Poe, Revolution & Remembrance Cemetery Tour of Baltimore, which will include the graves of Poe’s family and other Revolutionary War heroes buried at Westminster Hall.”

Poe Baltimore also has committed to

creating a permanent exhibit to share the story of Poe House and the Edgar Allan Poe Homes, the first housing project built in Baltimore City and the first for Black families during segregation.

“We have done some work to preserve the history of the housing project, which is now slated for demolition, but will return as public housing,” Jang explains. “We have oral histories from some of the original residents and those who moved in later. We can’t tell the Poe House story without also sharing how we have been neighbors with the housing project for over 80 years. It’s a powerful story and our hope is to share how we’ve survived together for all these years.”

To learn more about The Edgar Allan Poe House & Museum, visit poeinbaltimore.org. For tickets to Poe Fest International, visit poefestinternational.com. □

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based freelance writer.

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