COMING SOON TO A THEATER NEAR YOU

With the renovation of Berkeley’s UC Theatre, we’ll become the Bay Area’s concert mecca. In Fall Arts

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The benighted and newly engaged couple of Brad and Janet, the doomed Dr. Frank-N-Furter, and the rest of the zany crew from Transsexual, Transylvania, are headed back to Berkeley. The UC Theatre on University Avenue, which hosted the longest running sequence of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* midnight screenings, is going to open its doors again after 14 years, and the interactive, costumed late-night romp will once again be welcome, says David Mayeri, the board president of the nonprofit group behind the theater’s resurrection. But film will be only a small part of the offerings on tap at the new UC, which closed its doors in 2001 when Landmark Theatres balked at investing more than $1 million for seismic upgrades.

The project is scheduled to break ground in September and open for business around the summer of 2015 with a calendar of 75 to 100 shows in the first year. Outfitted with a state-of-the-art Meyer Sound system, the theater is reopening as an all-ages music venue with full-service restaurant and bar. The multi-tiered floor plan is designed to accommodate 1,460 general admission patrons with limited seating or 800 patrons seated cabaret-style at tables and chairs.

"There’s no venue of this size or type in the East Bay," says Mayeri, who parlayed a 1970 Berkeley High production internship with Bill Graham into a long career at Bill Graham Presents and Clear Channel Entertainment. "Meyer Sound is donating a sound system, and they’ve been instrumental as partners. Their team has been working with us for many years on acoustic enhancements to improve the sound of the theater."

Under the direction of the Berkeley Music Group, which is spearheading the theater’s revival, the plan is to present local and touring artists from an expansive array of roots, international, and pop music styles. Originally conceived as a for-profit venture with Warren Hellman serving as a major investor, the plan evolved after the

Hardly Strictly Bluegrass founder’s death in 2011. In April, Mayeri’s team announced the plans for the theater, along with a $2.5 million capital campaign, which he says in on track with more than 100 individual contributions so far.

By turning the UC into a nonprofit operation, the Berkeley Music Group has devised an ambitious plan for transforming the theater into a community resource. Team up with organizations like Berkeley Youth Alternatives and Youth UpRising in Oakland, the UC will offer “educational programs and workshops so that young people can learn best practices in production, budgeting, booking, and promoting shows,” Mayeri says. “We can also use the UC Theatre to help other nonprofits with their fundraising.”

Designed by noted Berkeley architect James Plachek, who also graced the city with the downtown library and the Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Building, the UC’s role in East Bay cultural history is far larger than providing a two-decade home for *Rocky Horror*. It was a foundation of the Landmark Theatres chain, and for a quarter century it drew cinephiles with double bills featuring classic foreign and domestic films. In a scene far stranger than anything associated with *Rocky Horror*, the UC witnessed German director Werner Herzog eating his shoe on the theater’s stage after losing a bet with Errol Morris (who won by completing his pet cemetery documentary *Gates of Heaven*). The incident was immortalized by Les Blank in his 21-minute doc *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*. If the Berkeley Music Group wants to top entertainment like that, they’ve got their work cut out for them.