



North America

UC Theatre Back On Track

By Deborah Speer

Posted Monday, April 06, 2015 at 7:14 am

The renovation of the 1,400-capacity UC Theatre in Berkeley, Calif., from movie house to concert hall by a non-profit headed by former Bill Graham Presents COO David Mayeri officially began with a March 18 groundbreaking.

The project, first announced in 2009, is led by the Berkeley Music Group, a nonprofit that will continue to spearhead fundraising and operation of the historic venue. Mayeri, the group's president, is a Berkeley native and spent much of his BGP career building and operating some of the most iconic venues in the greater Bay Area such as [Shoreline Amphitheatre](#) and [The Fillmore](#), among others.

It's also a "labor of love" for Mayeri, who saw the project through some fits and starts in the years before the first shovel hit dirt last month. While some of the original goals for the venue – which will retain its historic UC Theatre name – including an educational and community use component remain the same, it will operate as a non-profit rather than for-profit.

The group also absorbed a blow when one of its original funders, San Francisco financier Warren Hellman, died in December 2011. Hellman was also founder and funder of Hardly Strictly Bluegrass and supported many music venues and programs in the Bay Area. But with the support of the East Bay arts community, the UC Theatre project is on its way to becoming a vital cog in Berkeley's redevelopment of its downtown arts and culture district.

"There's three components things we want to accomplish," Mayeri told *Pollstar*. "There is the live music venue. There's an education program where we'll work with youth ages 17-25; teaching them the technology, creative and business aspects of concert event promotion. Half of those kids will be underserved youth. Then there will be the work with nonprofit organizations to help them with their fundraising," he said.

Since there will be full food and beverage service and room for a banquet configuration seating up to 600, Mayeri says performing arts, music, education and other nonprofits can do their fundraising at the UC Theatre, whether it be traditional gala events or banquets. If an organization has a relationship with an artist, they will be able to book that artist, take the box office receipts plus a match by the Berkeley Music Group up to a certain amount from the net, Mayeri said.

Unlike the nearby Freight & Salvage Coffeeshouse, which primarily serves as a concert venue and education facility focusing on acoustic and roots music, the UC Theatre will bring the same type of rock and pop performers one might see across the bay at The Fillmore. With the old blue theatre seats already ripped out, the new UC Theatre will sport a three-tier configuration for an intimate feel with great sight lines, full concessions, street and back-alley load-in, three dressing rooms and a state of the art Meyer Sound system.

A \$5.5 million capital campaign is well under way, and Mayeri says the BMG hopes to meet that goal by the end of construction later this year. The UC Theatre is one of Berkeley's oldest cultural institutions apart from the University of California campus just up the hill. Built in 1917 as a movie house, it closed for good 14 years after becoming known for showing classic and art films as well as weekend showings of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

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