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Berkeley's UC Theatre to reopen for music events

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Dark since 2001, Berkeley's UC Theatre - the University Avenue cinema beloved by generations of Berkeleysans and famous for its wild midnight screenings of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" - will reopen next year as a live music venue after a \$5 million renovation.

The new theater, run by the Berkeley Music Group, a nonprofit founded by Berkeley native and former Bill Graham Presents COO David Mayeri, will be a flexible, multitiered space that can accommodate about 1,400 patrons - or 800 seated cabaret-style at tables - and feature a wide range of rock, jazz and Americana, as well as the occasional comedy show, lecture or film.

In addition to a new expanded stage, restaurant and bar, and an education program focused on concert-production workshops and internships for local young folk, the renovated theater will have a sound system from Berkeley's Meyer Sound, whose owners, John and Helen Meyer, are major contributors to the project, along with the late Warren Hellman and his wife, Chris, Nion McEvoy and others.

"When I walked into the theater after spending 35 years with BGP, I saw a room that could just ignite downtown Berkeley and the East Bay music scene," Mayeri says. He has raised about \$2.7 million of the \$5.2 million goal of the capital campaign that officially takes off Wednesday, when plans for the 97-year-old theater will be announced in the long-shuttered space. Berkeley's Robert Remiker Architects has designed the renovation, with Charles Salter's firm attending to the acoustics.

Mayeri says it's too soon to talk about specific artists. He describes the acts the UC will book as rising stars of the sort who've "graduated" from top San Francisco clubs like Slim's, Yoshi's or the Great American Music Hall to bigger halls like the Fillmore, which has a capacity of 1,200.

Having grown up 12 blocks away, Mayeri, who saw "The Ten Commandments" at the UC in the mid-1950s, has an affinity for the place. He caught some of those interactive midnight "Rocky Horror" screenings that Landmark Theatres hosted there for years.

"I can't say I was brave enough to dress up, but I did attend," says Mayeri, a music business and Internet radio consultant who's donating his time and money to the project.

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