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Michael Mazer / The Chronicle



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COVER STORY

The UC Theatre rebo

By Sam Whiting

When veteran concert promoter David Mayeri was asked by a city of Berkeley planner to help find a use for the UC Theatre, he drove directly to University Avenue just to visit the tired old movie house.

He'd grown up 12 blocks from there and been coming to movies since his mother brought him to "The Ten Commandments" in the 1950s. Now the place had been dark for seven years and looked lonely and outdated.

One tenant had already decided it was too much work and backed out. Mayeri stood among the seats and thought hard about who could make a go of this joint, and only one name came to mind — Mayeri himself.

"I said to him, 'I know exactly what to do, make this into a fantastic live music room,'" he recalls, "and I'm thinking to myself, 'How do I put this together and make this happen?'"

The answer was to rip out 1,464 movie seats and reconfigure the theater as a concert hall with limited seating at tables and chairs, and a big sunken standing room in front. Seven years, \$6 million and one delayed opening later, Mayeri is opening the doors for the first time in 14 years to introduce the UC Theatre Taste Family Music Hall.

"If you were to describe the room to people, we are a cross between the Fillmore and the main floor of the Fox Theater in Oakland," says Mayeri. The theater will have a capacity of 1,400, making it the "the only mid-range house in the East Bay."

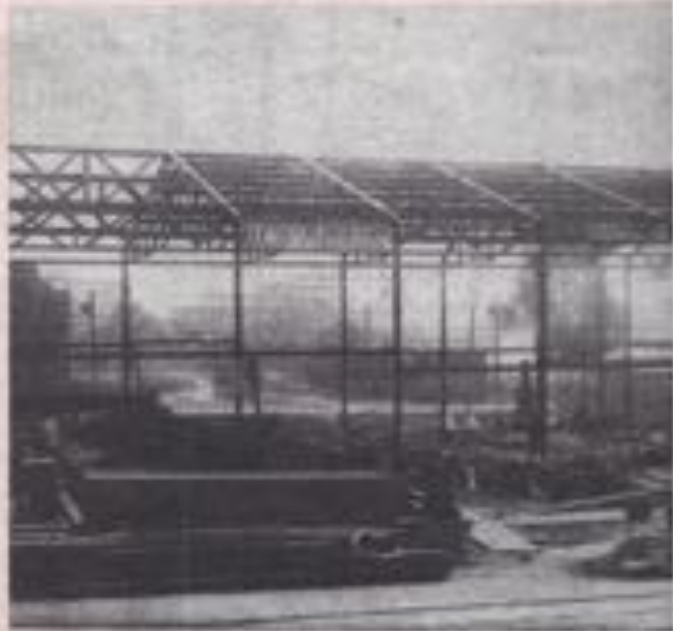
Online

David Mayeri shares his love for the 99-year-old UC Theatre at <http://bit.ly/218NDotL>.

Concerts: The Dark Star Orchestra plays April 7-9 at the UC Theatre, 2036 University Ave., Berkeley. (510) 346-4000; www.theuctheatre.org



Nearly century-old movie house,
closed for more than a dozen years,
reopens as concert hall in Berkeley



David Mayerl, left, concert promoter and chief of the Best project to convert the UC Theatre, which was built in 1926, house for decades, above, into the UC Theatre Taube Fam

TORY

Lines redrawn in arts district

By Sam Whiting

For years and years, the Addison Street Arts District consisted of the Berkeley Repertory Theatre, alone and lonely on a Dust Bowl of a street that could not shake its old handle as Auto Body Row.

The century turned, and then came the Aurora Theatre, the California Jazz Conservatory and Freight & Salvage, and now that the UC Theatre opened on Friday night, March 25, Berkeley Rep is

In 1933, the UC Theatre was a Fox theater.

surrounded on all sides by performance art.

All that is left of Auto Body Row are the words "Stadium

Garage" stamped into the facade of the Freight. You can walk door to door on Addison and find an arts organization behind each one.

This afternoon, Berkeley Rep has two matinees — "Macbeth" with Frances McDormand at the Soda Theatre and "Aubergine" at the Peet's Theatre, which reopened in January — and Aurora has a matinee of the West Coast premiere of "The How and the Why" by Sarah Treem of "House of Cards" fame.

If all three of those plays are at capacity, they will take 1,200 people off the streets, which would have left nothing but tumbleweeds in the old days. But this is the new downtown, which has doubled in population since 2000. Stir in condos, restaurants, coffee and craft beer, and it draws "easily a million people a year if you add it all together," says Michael Caplan, economic development manager for the city of Berkeley.

District continues on p. 27





By Lisa Blanchard and Carolyn Tang / The Chronicle

District from page 16

They are looking for more, so starting at noon, greeters will stand outside the Downtown Berkeley BART Station offering maps and directions, a necessary service because the Addison Street Arts District is no longer just Addison Street. The boundary has been pushed one block north and five blocks south, requiring a whole new handle on the Downtown Berkeley Arts District.

Within its ever-expanding boundaries are three movie theater complexes, three museums and six live music venues, with two more being built, three if you push the boundary up to Telegraph Avenue, where the Mad Monk Center for Anachronistic Media is coming soon to the old home of Cody's Books.

Further along is Cornerstone, a 500-person hall that will hark back to the glories of the Keystone Berkeley, from the 1920s to the 1950s.

On the corner of Durant and Shattuck, Cornerstone is the new south anchor of the downtown district and is expected to open in May, with a restaurant and craft beer garden on Shattuck and an entertainment entrance on Durant. Owner Alex Popov, whom some may remember as the guy who caught Barry Bonds' 73rd home run ball and ended up in a legal dispute, sees Cornerstone as an East Bay version of the Independent on Divisadero in San Francisco.

The other new venue is Rendon Hall, a 100-seat space for jazz to be modeled after Minton's Playhouse, which opened in 1958 in Harlem.

Two doors down from the Freight, Rendon Hall will open this fall with a full lineup. It will be operated by the jazz conservatory, which already holds concerts in Hardlysson Hall, a cozy performance space that is downstairs, in the jazz tradition.

"All of these arts venues are synergistic," says Susan Maz-

cardia, president of CJC, which serves 505 students as the only independent accredited music school in the country devoted to jazz. "The audience that comes to the Freight will see the California Jazz Conservatory and say, 'Let's go check them out.'"

The bigger question is if the audience for the UC Theatre, 1,400 strong, will check out the jazz and folk, live theater and strange film offerings one street over.

"The UC Theatre is going to change the complexion of downtown Berkeley's oeuvre, and it's going to be a tremendous asset for the East Bay and the Bay Area," says Mel Vapour, existential strategist for the East Bay Media Center, which runs an indie video and film festival at Addison and Milvia. "We've needed this for the last 25 years."

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John Marchand and Carolyn Song / The Chronicle

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UC Theatre reopens as music hall in Berkeley

UC Theatre from page 15

In Berkeley, the Community Theater holds 3,600, all reserved in upholstered seats, and Zellerbach Hall fits 2,500 in the same way. The Freight & Salvage collocation holds 440 seats. The UC has a richer lore than any of these and will also be more egalitarian, in the Berkeley tradition, as a general-admission venue with all tickets one price, usually \$30.

Despite its name, the UC, as it is commonly known, was never affiliated with the University of California one block west. It opened in 1917 as a nickelodeon with 2,200 seats and the largest screen in the West. In 1976, it became the flagship screen in the

Landmark Theatre chain started by Gary Meyer. "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" ran at midnight every Saturday for 23 years, making it the longest continuous run of any movie anywhere, with devotees in drag and goth screaming out every line and acting out every scene.

One of those "Rocky Horror" disciples was Shana Penn, a Cal student in the 1970s. Penn now runs Taube Philanthropies in Berkeley. It came through with a \$1.3

million matching grant, and now the Shana Penn Lobby leads to the Taube Family Music Hall featuring Meyer Sound in three separate systems — for acoustic, electric and cinematic shows.

Despite its fancy naming rights and polished interior, the place will carry the rock 'n' roll spirit of the Fillmore or, better yet, Winterland, the converted San Francisco ice rink that was to concerts in the '60s and '70s what Kezar Stadium was to football.

Winterland was the main stage of Bill Graham Presents, which also operated the Berkeley Community Theatre. As a 16-year-old Berkeley High School student, Mayeri got a paid internship at BGP. His job

UC Theatre continues on page 16

"We are a cross between the Fillmore and the main floor of the Fox Theater in Oakland."

David Mayeri, concert promoter

COVER STORY

UC Theatre from page 17

was to unload the trucks at Berkeley Community Theatre, then reload them after the show. This left plenty of time in between. On his first day, he followed the sound of two acoustic guitars into a dressing room where two musicians were sitting in folding chairs.

"The guy looks at me and says 'Hey, kid, c'mon in here.' So I get to walk into the room, and lean against the wall and watch James Taylor and Carole King riff back and forth."

That was the life for Mayeri, so he spent 35 years working for BGP and developed the low voice of someone who has spent half his life trying to be heard over loud rock bands. He retired as chief operating officer when BGP, which had already merged into SFX Corp., became part of the Live Nation concertopoly in 2005.

BGP was always a for-profit venture, made evident by the hundreds of thousands in wadded-up bills found in safe deposit boxes after Graham died in a helicopter crash in 1991. The UC started out for-profit, too, owned by Mayeri and other local promoters. But after major investor Warren Hellman died of leukemia in 2011, Mayeri lost his profit motive and switched it to a nonprofit run under the proletarian title Berkeley Music Group.

He still has investors but is not required to show a profit, and can accept donations like a museum or theater group. He can also offer the room for community events and set up a bar.



Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association 1997



Above: The UC Theatre opened in 1917 as a nickel-odeon with 2,200 seats and the largest screen in the West.

Left: After a make-over, the boxy movie house in Berkeley is reopening as a music venue.

Robert Decker

CHRISTOPHER WILSON/UC THEATRE

ORY



Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association 1997



Robert Becker

Above: The UC Theatre opened in 1927 as a nickel-odeon with 2,200 seats and the largest screen in the West.

Left: After a makeover, the boxy movie house in Berkeley is reopening as a music venue.

ing programs for kids like him, willing to load trucks just to be part of the show, though for more than the \$20 a night he was paid.

The UC is a Berkeley city landmark, and the old-timey detached box office still stands sentinel out front. From there the outer and inner lobbies move south toward Berkeley Rep before making a hard right turn into the theater, which runs east to west, parallel to University.

The room is not long and narrow like most movie theaters. To fit a pipe organ, the room was wide and box shaped, which may never have been ideal for movies but is suited to live performance and dancing.

For the first time, maybe since 1927, the UC will be stylish, with a long bar at the back and eight chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, a nod to Winterland when it was done up for "The Last Waltz" in 1976. Asked if he was at that show, Mayeri says, "Absolutely," and he can describe the Band's set list along with all the special guests, if need be, to prove it.

At 63, Mayeri is still the same backstage kid he was at 16. He gets excited when describing sound waves and different ceiling treatments to enhance acoustics. He no longer lives 12 blocks away, but he is still in "Outer Berkeley," he says, "also known as Orinda."

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