

# TOPSTOPS HISTORIC THEATERS | 2017

Based on concert and event grosses from April 16, 2016-May 15, 2017, as reported to *Venues Today*.

VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS
1. Radio City Music Hall, New York	6,013	\$101,243,604	1,252,203	236
2. Pantages Theatre, Los Angeles	2,720	\$2,650,029	20,978	8
3. El Rey Theatre, Los Angeles	771	\$1,850,101	78,295	126
4. The Theatre at Ace Hotel, Los Angeles	1,600	\$1,654,804	33,969	22
5. Palace Theatre, Albany, N.Y.	2,782	\$1,471,471	38,735	30
6. Orpheum Theatre, Los Angeles	2,000	\$1,349,660	26,686	16
7. Bob Hope Theatre, Stockton, Calif.	2,042	\$1,315,141	23,573	26
8. Arlington Theatre, Santa Barbara, Calif.	2,014	\$1,115,060	17,708	13
9. San Diego Civic Theatre	2,967	\$559,074	7,538	3
10. Coronado Perf. Arts Center, Rockford, Ill.	2,335	\$406,308	6,535	4

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be a performing arts center and not a Kung Fu palace," he said.

After the movie, he went straight to the marketing office to speak with the manager about rejuvenating the theater into something more than it had become. The two immediately formed a bond.

"He hated that it had become a Kung Fu palace," Bernardoni said.

The next four years played a crucial role in revamping and re-imagining what the theater could become.

Bernardoni was told that the Paramount was going to be torn down and a Holiday Inn would take its place on the block in downtown Austin.

"From 1971 to 1973, I worked a couple of part time jobs. I had no money, no muscle and no political pull," he said. "I had that singular laser focus burning that I was going to save that theater. Failure was possible, but I had nothing to lose."

He soon found that nobody cared about his project, saying that, "We ran into a China Wall of apathy. To most people, old buildings are old buildings."

Another problem was that in the early 70s, downtown Austin turned into a ghost town after 5:30 p.m. "No one came, because there was nothing to come back for," he said.

He persevered and joined forces with

Chuck Ekerman and Steve Scott, and both men saw the glowing prospect of a performing arts center in the old, beat-up theater.

The three men formed rapport with the local newspaper, television and radio stations, and to Bernardoni's surprise, the media found saving the theater a worthy cause.

"We decided to do three test shows to see if anyone would come downtown," he said.

They booked Dave Brubeck and sold out all three shows. "The atmosphere he brought to that theater was something I'll never forget. People walked out of there electrified," Bernardoni said.

That first round of success, which ultimately proved that people were willing to visit downtown Austin for nightlife, allowed the men to book old films, including "Casablanca," "Gone with the Wind" and "Wuthering Heights."

As the men continued to book shows, it became apparent that a clear path to saving the theater was being formed.

In 1978, Bernardoni and partners convinced those who owned the theater to donate their share so the men could take over the lease from ABC Interstate Theaters and start applying for grants to renovate the structure.

The first round of funding rang in at \$600,000. In 1979, they got two more rounds of funding with one at \$750,000 and a second \$600,000.

"We hired an architect, and we started in phases," Bernardoni said.

They ripped out all the seats, rebuilt the opera balconies, cleaned-up the facade, and added air conditioning and new bathrooms.

The renovations were complete in September of 1980, and the theater started hosting Broadway musicals, dance shows and performances by local artists.

For the next few years, the theater was operated by only five people, Bernardoni included, and it thrived.

"There was actually enough money to pay us all," he said.

In June of 1985, Bernardoni decided to leave the Paramount and start his own production company, feeling extremely satisfied with what he and a group of dedicated partners had accomplished.

"It was a love affair then, and I'm still in love," he said.

Fast forward to current day, and the theater hosts a whopping 275 shows a year, said Jim Ritts, who is the current general manager of the venue.

The love affair with the Paramount doesn't just belong to Bernardoni and his partners, Ritts said. It also belongs to those who have frequented the theater over the years.

"We're now on the sixth generation of people coming to the theater," Ritts said.

## TAMPA THEATRE TIES COMMUNITY TOGETHER THROUGH MOVIES

**Tampa (Fla.) Theatre**

**Original name: Tampa Theatre**

**Year built: 1926**

**Number of original seats: 1,500**

**Renovation: 1976**

Unlike the Paramount in Austin, the Tampa Theatre hosts only movies — classics, new releases and independent films.

It, too, went through a dramatic rescue period in the 70s, but this was not a singular love affair that saved the theater. Instead, it was a community effort by those who refused to see the magnificent structure torn down, said John Bell, general manager of the venue.

"The community rallied that the theater needed to be saved," he said. "It's turned out to be a resounding success story."