

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: James Baudoin, - 828.258.1850

May 25, 2011

“EVOLVING PLANS FOR ASHEVILLE’S PERFORMANCE CENTER”

The Board of Directors of the Asheville Area Center for the Performing Arts recently conducted its annual planning retreat at the YMI Cultural Center. While the Board meets monthly to address its immediate issues, the annual retreat offers time for visioning and long-range planning. Successful performance centers no longer stand dark except during evening events, so planning for long-term sustainability must address changing patron expectations, emerging technology and new revenue opportunities.

THEATER TECHNOLOGY

Large multiuse halls are becoming increasingly complex, with more sophisticated stage lighting, sound and multimedia capabilities to support theatrical and popular music events. The technical infrastructure designed into new halls can provide for sophisticated corporate meetings with video uplinks, broadcast and recording of events via television and the web, and a wide range of complex resources to support creative media arts programs. Classical art forms are embracing the technologies: the new Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles is now broadcasting Los Angeles Philharmonic concerts to Asheville’s

Carolina Cinemas, and the MET Opera live broadcasts sell out here and around the world. Recently much press attention has been given to the New World Center in Miami, which features multiple video screens within its symphony hall and transmits the concerts onto the exterior façade of the new complex. Including advanced technology is the new standard for theatre design. The future Asheville hall is expected to have HD cameras built-in for frequent program transmissions and a host of other technological resources.

NEW MEDIA

The methods of communicating with patrons are changing rapidly. The explosive popularity of social media at a time that newspapers and network television are on decline necessitates rethinking of not only how to reach prospective patrons with marketing dollars but also how to communicate with them once they arrive at the facility. Constant streams of information about upcoming events are now on the web and account for a greater percentage of total ticket sales each season. We must not only be able to provide ticket information via broadband, but also to use the latest communications means to direct patrons to available parking the night of the show, provide program information, and conduct audience surveys moments after the event. It's common already for performance organizations to have many thousands of people on email lists and also be highly active with social media including Facebook and Twitter. Clearly the success of the future center will depend on its capacity to effectively utilize new media to build attendance for events.

PATRON EXPERIENCE

“Theater lobby design has evolved significantly since I started planning venues in the 1970’s” notes James Baudoin, Executive Director. “Back then, adequate ventilation and ash urn locations for cigarette smokers inside the building were big concerns. Now the focus is on multiple and varied food and drink concessions at all lobby levels.” Concessions services today may often include both a martini bar and a cappuccino bar, as well as diverse culinary offerings in sit-down cafes. The traditional stand-up theater lobby is replaced with numerous comfortable seating areas so patrons can socialize before and after shows. Patrons expect restroom capacity to far exceed code minimums, and services must be placed on all audience levels. Performance center lobby and entrance plaza areas are now available to the public during the day, not just before events. Patrons use performance centers as meeting and lunch destinations just as they would a hotel lobby.

A GREEN CENTER

Another trend is the greening of performing arts centers. According to John Coyne at Theatre Projects Consultants, “every significant performance venue in design today is fully attentive to sustainable design.” The Performance Center in Asheville is expected to achieve LEED silver certification (LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). Certification is awarded on a system of points related to site development, water saving and energy efficiency, materials and indoor environmental quality. Even a few short years ago there wasn’t even a vocabulary for this topic; now attention is given from the first day of design to use of recycled materials, enhanced

energy conservation and multimodal transportation opportunities. The new center may have sections of green roof that will provide thermal and sound insulation while it captures storm water. Local materials such as North Carolina stone may be used, rather than transporting materials from longer distances, both saving fossil fuel and earning LEED points. Many new facilities utilize recycled products, such as bathroom tiles of crushed glass bottles and materials related to steel structure, theater railings, carpet, acoustic tiles and doors.

GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

We live in a rapidly changing world with new advances in many areas. Nothing replaces the unique experience of live performers in front of a live audience. Our challenge as we move forward is to augment live performances with unique experiences through new technologies and to meet the changing demands of today's audiences. There are significant new opportunities for maximizing usage of a public venue. Traditionally supported mainly by ticket sales and annual fund drives, performance venues can now earn significant revenue from expanded food and beverage services as well as licensing fees for broadcast rights. (A country recording star, for example, can easily stage a televised concert). Operating costs are also affected by continuing development of more energy-efficient mechanical and theatrical systems. The true impact of all these changes is expected to be all for the good for the future Performance Center. Information on the project is available at www.theperformancecenter.org and by calling the project office at 828-258-1850.

END