

# The Academy of Music Theatre

## Vision statement

June 2007

### BACKGROUND

In January 2007, the Board of Trustees for the Academy of Music unanimously voted to discontinue the nightly showing of first-run films, an action that had been recommended by an independent theater consultant a few years prior. Faced with lower-than-expected revenues from movies and donations during 2006, board members made the difficult decision to halt the films in order to avoid amassing further debt. Live performances, however, would continue unabated at the 800-seat theater. In making its decision, the Board of Trustees pledged to seek public input as to the types of programming community members would like to see in the historic building at 274 Main St. The Board also sought to initiate a discussion about the relationship between the Academy and the City of Northampton, which owns the building, and between the Academy and other community arts organizations.

In conjunction with representatives of Center for the Arts, the Northampton Arts Council and the City Council's Cultural Committee, the Board of Trustees held two community forums to solicit programming ideas for the Academy. The forums were held Feb. 17 and March 25, with nearly 200 people attending the first, and 60, the second. Public interest in the Academy also spurred a flurry of local media coverage about the theatre's operation and role in the community.

Since January, community members have offered the Academy financial support as well as their ideas. The Northampton Arts Council raised \$3,722 for the Academy during the Four Sundays performances, and another \$4,037 during the Young at Heart benefit screening. Local restaurateur Claudio Guerra generously donated \$5,480 from the grand opening celebration for his newest eatery, Mama Iguana's, in recognition of the relationship between restaurants and the arts in drawing visitors and revenue to the city.

During this time period, the Board of Trustees also entered an agreement with public television station WGBY–Springfield, which included both fundraising and programming components. WGBY took over the basic fundraising tasks for the Academy and, in exchange, the Board agreed to provide the venue for as many as 10 public television events throughout the year. The first, an advance screening and audience discussion of the film “Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience,” took place April 13, and was free and open to the public.

Taking into account feedback from the community at two forums, and in e-mails, letters and telephone calls, the Board of Trustees established a two-year framework for operations at the Academy. This vision for the near future addresses the Academy’s finances and programming.

## **VISION**

Over the course of the next two years, the Board of Trustees has made it a priority to: retire the Academy of Music’s debt; establish an endowment fund; pursue relationships with regional performing arts organizations to become established presenters of community-based theatrical, musical and dance performances; and provide a venue for artistically worthy films not ordinarily screened in the area’s commercial cinemas.

## **REALIZING THE VISION**

Working with the WGBY fundraisers, the Board of Trustees will seek to increase membership and eliminate the Academy’s debt, including what is owed to film distribution companies. Paying off the film company debt will ensure these companies will be willing to contract with the Academy in the future. The Board’s newly formed Fundraising Committee – consisting of trustees and members of the public – will also pursue efforts to raise the funds required to replace the marquee and identification signage at the front of the Academy of Music and to establish an endowment fund.

The Board of Trustees will actively solicit rentals of the theater and promote its

unique ability to couple live performances with films or other media. Performances at the Academy during the first several months of 2007 were achieved without any advertising beyond coverage of the film decision in the local media. With the theater's calendar freed from the lengthy commitments required by movie studios for showing first-run films, promoters and performing arts organizations took advantage of the opportunity to stage performances at the acoustically superb historic theater. During the first three months of the year the Academy hosted 11 separate film screenings and 15 live performances.

The Board of Trustees will seek to establish long-term relationships with area arts organizations that have a history of presenting performances at the Academy including: the Center for the Arts, Pioneer Valley Ballet, Pioneer Valley Performing Arts School, Northampton Arts Council, Northampton Independent Film Festival and Commonwealth Opera. The Board will also seek to create long-term relationships with other area performing arts organizations such as Pioneer Valley Symphony, New Century Theater, Arcadia Players, Music in Deerfield, Hampshire Shakespeare Company and Valley Light Opera. Toward that end, the Board will create a rate schedule that allows rentals to be more affordable to non-profit arts organizations.

The Board of Trustees will continue to work with public television station WGBY of Springfield to present both live and film events at the Academy.

The Board of Trustees will continue to explore financially responsible ways to introduce films in some capacity at the Academy.

The Board of Trustees will continue to welcome feedback from the public and offer opportunities for the public to volunteer in various capacities at the Academy of Music. The most efficient way for the public to provide feedback is by emailing [info@academyofmusictheatre.com](mailto:info@academyofmusictheatre.com). Ongoing volunteer opportunities include assisting at fundraisers and mailings, ushering at live performances; and donating services, equipment, materials. To volunteer, go online to the Academy's Web site, [www.academyofmusictheatre.com](http://www.academyofmusictheatre.com), and fill out the volunteer inquiry form.

The Board of Trustees will contract with an independent bookkeeper to manage

the Academy's finances and regularly provide fiscal information to the Board and the City of Northampton so that the city can perform audits. Also, the Board will pursue the addition of a city representative to its Finance Committee.

### **THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

As the Board of Trustees begins the next fiscal year, it does so without any vacancies. Having recently filled two empty seats, the 11-member board is complete. Newly elected Board members include Gail Yacuzzo, co-owner of the Eastside Grill who is returning to the Board after completing a six-year term in 2005 and Leah Kunkel, a local attorney and vocalist who formerly served as chair of the Northampton Center for the Arts. The Board of Trustees is currently comprised of the following:

Andrew Crystal, president

Gail Yacuzzo, vice president

Stuart Mieher, treasurer

Kristen Cole, clerk

Carol T. Christ, Smith College president

Susan Fentin

Clare Higgins, Northampton mayor

Leah Kunkel

Linda McInerney, fundraising committee chairperson

Alan Sharpe

Paul Weinberg

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