

PERFORMING ARTS MUSEUM PROPOSAL
EXPLORATORY STUDY

Presented by

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PERFORMING ARTS VISIONING STUDY

Executive Summary

The concept of a performing arts museum was both a difficult and surprising idea for many arts leaders to embrace. In spite of their surprise, interviewees shared many ideas about potential partners and concerns.

The first, and singularly most emphasized, point from arts leaders was the critical need to establish partnerships with high traffic existing performing arts venues and community spaces such as libraries, Sacramento International Airport, theaters (e.g. Tower) or the Sacramento Convention Center. Because the concept inherently attracts a small niche market, partnerships provide the opportunity, at minimal operating cost, to attract an audience and introduce the community to the notion that the region has a performing arts history. Without such a partnership, there is no chance for this project to survive. Concerns centered on four broad areas: the challenge of securing sustainable funding; demonstrating a significant need and community benefit; defining the scope of the collection, and defining the target audience.

Museum programming and display ideas varied widely. The interviewees were asked to imagine the possibilities of a proposed museum without a clearly defined audience. Suggestions included (and not limited to) both a physical and virtual space, a place for children to role-play, a source for academic and arts researchers, rotating cases for historic displays, and video streaming.

Purpose of Study

As a result of this study, I learned that some of the original actors and actresses from theater of the 1940s are still living and have stories to share. Other performers and technicians died before they could share their story. Any existing collections are stored in people's homes or in other locations that are inaccessible to the public at large.

I have been advised that no group or venue to date is telling either an integrated or "big picture" history of Sacramento region's performing arts. What the community knows, if anything, is told in fragments, possibly through a single local radio interview or an isolated feature article in the *Sacramento Bee* or not at all.

The single greatest concern appeared to be that more veteran performers could die before they get an opportunity to share their historical perspectives. As a result, primary sources for Sacramento and regional theater will be lost. The stories that celebrate and create awareness of the region's performing arts heritage remain hidden and untold. Opportunities for research, re-creation, public exhibitions, lectures, education and play continue to be unavailable.

Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study (also referred to as the Visioning Process) was to:

- Identify the interest and need for establishing either a site or vehicle to preserve a collection of artifacts and/or oral histories for community, education and scholarly use.
- Identify the potential feasibility of developing such a project.

- Discuss planning objectives, strategies and actions to move the concept from a vision to the next stage in its development.

Scope of Study

This visioning process involved a series of personal interviews with arts leaders and museum professionals in Sacramento, Yolo and Placer Counties. The individuals were chosen because of their professional affiliations and representation at the central core of the region. Each person was asked the same series of five questions. In later interviews, I advised the interviewees when their thoughts were similar (or completely opposite) to others who had been interviewed and that further expanded the interviewee's comments during the conversation.

Limitations of Study

The original scope of work specified conducting several interviews and two focus group meetings. Comments from the interviews were to help inform (and prepare for) the visioning process during the facilitated meetings. The group of community arts leaders invited to participate in the visioning process **was not inclusive of every arts group, venue or individual in Sacramento**, although the list was fairly comprehensive. Within a few days of sending out focus group invitations and making phone calls, it became clear there was little interest in attending a focus group (regardless of time or day) from those queried via email or by phone. Most participants ignored my phone calls and email correspondence. In fact, almost everyone that was reached by email or phone was willing to grant **only** a 20-minute interview. Some interviewees who expressed initial interest were unreachable for a conversation after numerous attempts to contact them.

The names of those interviewed, those who could not be reached and those who did not respond are included with this summary. I did hold one focus group on a Saturday afternoon and not a single participant came. Even the few who had responded favorably did not come.

The individual interviews yielded many ideas as well as potential partners and challenges. Common themes began to emerge. The respondents raised far more questions than were asked to further clarify the purpose of, need and use for establishing a performing arts museum. After completing a series of 12 interviews, I chose not to hold a second focus group as a result of the combined lack of interest in responding to invitations and the unavailability of library meeting space for evenings and weekends.

Interview Questions

- Imagine what a performing arts museum look like to you (images, program, content, facility)
- What need does it satisfy in the community? How will visitors use it?
- What do you see as obstacles or challenges to making this happen?
- Are you familiar with other models that may be similar in concept or with leadership to look to for advice?
- Who else do you know who might be interested in being involved or contributing in some way to this study? (key organizations, key partners, collaborators)
- What are your ideas for funding the conceptual project?

From the questions stated above, the interviewees contributed the following information arranged as a *strategic planning summary* to guide further development during this conceptual phase.

Possible Goals for Performing Arts Museum/Space

- Academic research on rich heritage of theater, culture and the arts, a repository for historical artifacts and information
- Children's museum, exploration or performance space
- Virtual space – using computer for historical research or online distribution of content (broadcast historical or contemporary performances)
- Changing displays in high traffic areas of historical artifacts, historic interpretation (Gold Rush through early 20th century) of theater, ballet, music

Prospective Audiences

- School field trips (K-12) aligned with state performing and visual arts content standards
- Children's museum - set design, costuming, performance, exploration space
- Academic or arts industry researchers
- Arts patrons in a facility awaiting or during a performance
- Researchers of oral histories
- Faith-based community (church-based performances)

Questions and Concerns

Responses were mixed to the concept of a museum. Most interviewee reactions ranged from complete surprise, an impossible dream and belief that such a project is an irresponsible investment of resources. At the opposite end of the "interest spectrum," some

interviewees fully embraced the concept as an intriguing creative and educational opportunity that can make sense, if done collaboratively.

There was serious concern among those interviewed that there is not yet a demonstrated community need. They have not heard anyone (individual or group) asking, “Where is the collection?” or “How can we get access to...?” The consultant also heard, “Sacramento is not New York or San Francisco. Sacramento does not have the social capital and the level of performing arts opportunities to make this location a viable site for a performing arts museum that would attract enough people to use it.” Interviewees report and research confirms that the San Francisco Museum of Art and Design, one of several successful models, is experiencing severe financial distress and attendance numbers are low regardless of what is being displayed.

Another serious concern was obtaining sustainable funding for such a project when existing arts organizations are on a “white knuckler ride trying to stay alive” through this economy already. Others responded that many artists are unemployed and allocating resources to creating a new facility that gives homage to the past is irresponsible.

Other questions and concerns included:

- Is *museum* the right name for this project? Is it premature to call the project a *museum*?
- A museum is considered *static* and performing arts (whatever genre) are *alive* and filled with movement. Stillness of a museum is incongruent with performing arts.
- Is there a market large enough in Sacramento (and outlying areas) to sustain a permanent project for general public use? Niche audience is very narrow
- If so, what audience will it attract? (e.g. researchers, school field trips, arts patrons)

- What stories will be told? Are they historically significant? How can those stories be told? Who are the characters? Is there a significant outcome?
- Who were the area visionaries that made a significant contribution to Sacramento performing arts history?
- Does the concept complement the effort to elevate the arts to another dimension?
- How can the project be relevant to community members?
- What does the Sacramento performing arts legacy communicate to the community? Does it mean that Sacramento is a leader in technology, provides careers, a meaningful transitional story from theater to movies?
- What is the scope and value of the collection? What is the focus of the collection? How will it be curated?
- The collection must fully reflect the local community and diverse cultures.
- Will film festivals be included in the umbrella of performing arts genres?
- How can other counties feel ownership about a collection in Sacramento?
- Can other counties have their own collections?
- Whatever the collection is, it needs an anchor facility to store it.
- Will there be willingness to share and travel?

Sacramento Cultural Challenges

Sacramento as a region presents its own challenges to moving projects forward, independent of concerns specific to the project:

- People are generally stubborn about imposing other models in Sacramento
- Fights for every inch of ground to implement a model approach makes innovation difficult

- Community has multiple overlapping interests
- Lots of silo creations in town (governmental bodies, etc)
- Absence of corporate boards creates a “knowledge gap” because board resources integrate with nonprofit organizations with the knowledge of how to make things work. Notion that moving forward means getting things done. The process is very action oriented, even when mistakes are made.

Community Needs & Benefits

Arts leaders in the region are the first to cite multiple values of the impact of performing arts on the economic vitality of Sacramento and surrounding counties. Interviewees celebrate the performing arts as community assets; knowing the arts are a vital part of the social infrastructure. All interviewees embody the concept that the arts provide a level of civic pride, feed the soul and define who we are as a society. There was also general agreement about performing arts inspiring civic pride. Everyone values changing the community conversation to value arts and culture.

“Exposure to the arts, is the future of the arts...A vast majority of people has no exposure to the arts...To perpetuate creative and mind expansion, we want to better serve those who don’t participate in the arts; the untapped market.” Ron Cooper, Executive Director Access Sacramento. “Storytelling is the gateway to all art forms. It is the core of every art form. Storytelling is a performance art. “

Alison Cagley, the Development Director at Music Circus described the organization as having a long family history in Sacramento. They have a national and international reputation. Cagley stated that in summer 2011, they received 11,000 applications from actors around the world for 120 positions. She continued, “Our history provides

credibility.” However, Cagley also explains, “We have archives, but the organization does not spend time celebrating them. We think about what is coming next. We don’t look backwards.”

Interviewees agreed that establishing a performing arts museum needs to be a community driven process. For instance, asking a visitor to remember their first live performance experience gives him or her a relevant connection and reason to be engaged.

In order to establish a definitive case for community need and benefits, interviewees all asked additional questions. Given the concerns previously stated, the interviewees were asking for further clarification to establish a significant need in the community.

- Does the concept complement the effort to elevate the arts to another dimension?
- How could this be valuable to schools?
- How could distance (online) library be used? Posting interviews, short clips or a performance collage accessible to anyone, anywhere, for example.
- How to bring value and relevance to promoting living treasures?
- Can a performing arts museum that preserves information about those from the region, who have achieved fame, inspire young people to follow?

Opportunities to Explore

Kevin Patterson of Red Barn Productions explained that his parents had been teachers. They established Renaissance Faires as the answer to static museums. The Faires offer first person interpretation as theatrical teaching material. (Patterson is the producer for various special events presented by the Old Sacramento Historical Foundation).

Patterson agreed with every other person interviewed that establishing partnerships with existing performing arts venues and other community entities is the only way any form of performing arts museum will survive.

Partnerships

- Develop a partnership with an existing space (performing arts space or display cases in the library, Sacramento International Airport, Tower Theater, etc) as the first step toward creating an awareness of performing arts as a historical topic.
- A collaborative partnership with an existing facility to accommodate exhibit space or displays is the best way to attract an audience (adults, children, schools) and sustain the project at the lowest cost.
- Eagle Theater, Sacramento History Museum, California State Parks, Woodland Opera House for early California presentations.
- California Museum for special events, displays or programming.
- Partner with a complementary museum to create combined school field trips.

Programming and Exhibits

Performing arts are alive. The experience of visiting a performing arts museum must also be interactive. Need to balance static with live art because performing arts are a dynamic process. They are what patrons *hear and see in the moment*. Improvisational theater has a living role in a museum. Create sense of pride and continuity among visitors that this display is the latest, not the last development in performing arts.

A museum needs interactivity to successfully engage and retain audiences. Create a virtual conversation with online distribution of content. Use a live stream of video (Access Sacramento sound bites) on a series of screens, featuring historic shows or ballet.

What are the significant stories? Uncover the stories of the Gold Rush, the significant characters in Sacramento (and regional) history. Feature historic photos and short stories of prominent historic performers. Use a *Hall of fame* type of exhibit to highlight people, theater and dance companies that have come and gone.

A growing exhibition that adds new items to the collection each year. Rotate collections of scripts, unique costumes and sets from ballet and theater.

Experiences for children. Costumes, masks, shoes and hats to try on, a mini-stage for role-playing, stage sets to design and/or puppets to play with. Use the San Francisco Exploratorium as a model - shadow walls invite children to get into the act.

Create awareness of Sacramento's performing arts history. Create media attention by querying KVIE Viewfinder segment (or similar programming) to create a 30-minute documentary on historical Sacramento performing arts to help create awareness of the region's history and its players.

Historical research online and through local experts. Create a catalog of information about people who have worked in Sacramento and access it interactively. Historical performing arts experts can be available for consulting services.

Physical space

The use of space is generational. *Physical* and *virtual* spaces will attract different ages of audiences and can be used to accomplish different goals.

- Is the museum a physical space or virtual space? Both physical and virtual spaces are necessary to balance life and vitality of the exhibits. Is the museum mobile, such as a traveling trunk that can be useful for outreach?

- Test out concepts with traveling exhibits to create awareness that Sacramento has a performing arts history.
- Be attached to what the community defines as a premiere arts venue (B Street, H Street, Mondavi, Folsom 3 stages). Use the space for programming when the theater is dark. In high traffic arts venues, patrons visit prior to performance or during intermission. Puts people in mood to view performance – with a coffee bar.
- Revolving exhibits 3-6 months. Develop a constantly fresh interactive space.
- Use a performing arts facility during the day when it is dark as a “museum space” for school field trips.
- Using Sacramento International Airport as a venue for display is high traffic, a captive audience and can celebrate the performing arts of several area counties.

Virtual Space

Virtual spaces are considered a unique portal for transmitting and receiving information. When using a virtual space, interviewees stated how important it is to be assured that the virtual world does not detract from the live experience.

- Website with online accessibility
- Live video streaming of remote events
- Example: PORTS program through California State Parks (Portable Online Resources for Teachers and Students)
- Archived series of performances, images, oral histories
- Create more accessibility to serve beyond the region
- Holographic communications a possibility

Operations

Discussing the operational side of the proposed museum is premature. However, respondents added their expertise on this topic during the conversation.

- A single curator (volunteer, stipend or salary) with a cadre of volunteers. Need archival storage, intellectual inventory and established collection management practices.
- Virtual delivery process involves content permission, production capability to capture the events and multiple methods of delivery.
- Volunteers for virtual delivery process needed to produce, document, distribute and live streaming.

Funding

The need for developing partnerships rose again in a discussion of funding strategies. Is there a way for corporations to support the performing arts and be acknowledged for their corporate support? What businesses profit from a healthy, vibrant arts community? Restaurants? Create a collective of restaurants to pool money for the arts with rotating exposure through a virtual website. Google Ad sense is a way to bring in business through click and pay, and other non-traditional web-based endeavors.

Performing Arts Museum Models and Other Collections *(see separate sheet for additional information and websites)*

- *San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design – a community-driven process.* San Francisco was the hub of cultural activity. All players collected items and nourished the collections. An alternate location was required because the collection had

become so large. A non-profit organization was formed around the collection and in search of a permanent home for display. The original location for the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design was the Presidio Branch Library in 1980. San Francisco Museum was modeled after the NY public library performing arts collection. To date, the museum experiences low attendance despite the quality and stature of the exhibits.

- *Smithsonian SITES (traveling exhibits)*
- *New York Public Library*
- *Shakespeare Globe Theater in London*
- *Czech Republic (see Barbara Edwards, For Arts Sake Program Manager)*
 - Arts education curriculum
 - Children make a set, create with fabrics (dark, scary, fun)
 - Film making / Claymation
 - Heroes & villains
 - Puppetry

Las Vegas has established numerous museums and facilities to bring “real culture” into an artificial world. More information is available through the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce at www.lvchamber.com.

Additional Resource Organizations

- Mid American Arts Alliance
- Museum theater alliance
- California Historical Society www.californiahistoricalsociety.org
- Association of state and local history www.aaslh.org

- California Association of Museums www.calmuseums.org
- Institute of Museum and Library Services www.imls.gov
- Social media: You've got mail Thomas.cott@verizon.net

Allison Cagley recommends Cott because he collects articles regarding arts organizations that include trends from an assortment of publications. He posts a blog with archives to engage in a national conversation.

Contributions of Local Arts Organizations

Access Sacramento contribution

Access Sacramento has a long history of recording and replaying performances with cooperation of a performing group. If the core planning group decides to pursue a virtual learning environment, Ron Cooper informed me of the possibility to live stream two events per week or demonstration of a performance art. This option would extend the reach of the audience. There are costs involved and copyright issues to resolve. He said the idea is based on the PBS model of presenting an event multiple times to provide opportunity to seek corporate underwriting or sponsorships for a tangible product that offers multiple viewer impressions.

Conclusion

This exploratory study to establish a Sacramento-based performing arts museum presented a number of engaging opportunities to consider that can inform and educate a regional audience through the preservation and display of performing arts stories, memorabilia and video clips. To transform the concept into tangible and sustainable programming and/or displays requires addressing a series of ongoing challenges. The concept inherently attracts a small niche audience. The respondents unanimously agreed that it could survive only by entering sustained partnerships with existing performing arts venues or community facilities that generate their own traffic.

Project Recommendations

In light of the comments expressed by the interviewees during this visioning process, I recommend the following actions in order to move the concept forward.

1. Identify immediate priorities within the core planning group (i.e. Sacramento Historical Society, California Stage) based on what the group determines as the most urgent need to accomplish as the next phase of development. For example, step one, begin the immediate collection of oral histories as the first “collection” and/or engage in the larger planning process of steps 2-8 to build the project.
2. Identify if “museum” is indeed what the project will be labeled.
3. Create the mission statement of the proposed performing arts museum, define the audience to be served and scope of the collection.
4. Review and address the questions and concerns described in this summary internally (within the core planning group) before engaging in additional community interviews or focus groups. Additional interviews and/or focus groups

from this point should help the core planning group address the respondents' questions and concerns as they engage in the next stage of the overall planning process.

5. Reach out again to the individuals and groups who were invited to the focus group and did not respond to verify if they have any interest in being part of the planning process.
6. Identify leadership outside the core planning group who would be interested in helping champion the concept and move it forward within the Sacramento community.
7. Begin identifying collection(s) and using partners to create displays that build an awareness of performing arts heritage in the Sacramento region and/or support future programming. Aim for full representation of all cultures and disciplines as they are reflected in local and outlying communities.
8. Determine how the planning process will evolve: set project goals, identify sources for collection(s), launch a content driven feasibility study and planning campaign. A feasibility study needs to demonstrate why the museum is a priority to be seriously considered and the relevance of creating a performing arts museum in the Sacramento region.
9. Use existing interviewees as a launching pad for ongoing support as possible and interested.

Performing Arts Museums Facilities (representative models)

Canada

Oral History Museum
www.ohmuseum.ca
 Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Canada

Hands on interactive gallery – without walls

USA

SITES
 Smithsonian Institute of Traveling Exhibitions
www.ssi.si.edu

San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design
www.mpdsf.org

New York City Public Library, Performing Arts Collection
www.nypl.org/locations/pa

Dance Art Museum of the Americas, Santa Fe, NM
www.danceartmuseum.com

Harvard and Yale special theater collections

Australia

The Arts Centre of Melbourne
www.theartscentre.com

Performing arts collection combined with theater and dance venue

Great Britain

University of Bristol Theatre Collection
www.bris.ac.uk/theatrecollecion/aboutus.html

His Majesty's Theatre, Museum for Performing Arts
www.hismajestystheatre.com.au/default.aspx?MenuId=286

The Theatre Museum, National Museum of the Performing Arts
 Part of Victoria and Albert Museum

Smithsonian website - museums

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/topics/Location-Museums.html>
 A series of photos of “niche” museums with links to individual sites