

# BACKSTAGE

At The Gordon Square Arts District

*The Art of Economic Development*

## THE HEART & THE SOUL

OF THE  
GORDON SQUARE ARTS DISTRICT  
IS THEATRE.

When the goals of this unique collaboration are realized, the West Side of Cleveland will be reborn as an arts and entertainment district with three distinct theatre venues – the Capitol film theatre, the Cleveland Public Theatre with its cutting-edge, original performances and Near West Theatre, a community center that transforms lives through the theatre arts. This edition of Backstage highlights the impact theatre can make on individual lives and neighborhood economic development.

### TRANSFORMING LIVES AT NEAR WEST THEATRE

For more than 30 years, under the direction of Executive Director Stephanie Morrison-Hrbek and Artistic Director Bob Navis, Near West Theatre (NWT) productions have unsettled, inspired, enchanted and provoked audiences by addressing the issues of prejudice, classism, stereotyping, discrimination, and violence.

NWT delivers high-quality theatre productions and programming through an inclusive, self-esteem building process and makes them affordable to the community. Each year it produces four major productions utilizing musical theatre as the genre so that the greatest number of participants can get involved. Each project includes an average of 35-55 cast members supported by 150 volunteers who work in front of house activities as well as backstage crews.

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### CREATING THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN THEATRE AT CPT



Since its founding in 1981 by James Levin, Cleveland Public Theatre (CPT) has become Cleveland's leading stage for experimental theatre, achieving national stature in the process. This Spring *American Theatre Magazine* recognized Cleveland Public Theatre Executive Artistic Director Raymond Bobgan as one of 25 theatre artists who are working to shape the next 25 years of theatre in America. According to the magazine the selected artists "Demonstrated something special in their approach to the art and craft of theatre making that convinced us they have not only vision and foresight about the field they've chosen, but the tenacity and commitment it will take to realize their aspirations over time." Under Bobgan's leadership, Levin's original goal of producing innovative, original work dealing with provocative political and social issues featuring culturally and ethnically diverse artists continues to drive programming at CPT.

CPT's commitment to the community and its belief that theatre transforms lives is evident in the ongoing work with inner city youth and adult men and women in recovery. Classes initially offered in schools and neighborhood centers eventually developed into a comprehensive outreach and education program. In April, Bobgan and CPT Director of Education Chris Seibert spent two weeks in Turkey teaching a group of Turkish artists how to use theatre arts to engage marginalized youth, a topic CPT knows very well. Its Student Theatre Enrichment Program (STEP) engages inner-city teens in a rigorous and rewarding theatrical journey, focusing on excellence in performance, play creation, writing, and production. Beginning its 16th year with auditions this Spring, up to 50 youth will learn theatre

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NWT's fall 2008 production, *Finian's Rainbow*, is known for its satirical presentation of some of the most controversial subject matter in theatre. The production addressed race, class and power in America - proof that musical theatre is more than just fluff and escapism.

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# Streetscape and Parking Update



If you have traveled on Detroit Avenue between West 58th and West 73rd Streets you know that the streetscape renovations are well underway. The underground work is finished. Now through mid-June the old sidewalks and curbs are being removed on the north side of Detroit Avenue to make way for new sidewalks that will be four feet wider with inlaid paving stones. During construction one lane of traffic will be maintained in each direction. In June the traffic will move toward the new north curbs and the south side of the street will undergo the same transformation. A ribbon-cutting celebration marking the completion of the \$3.5 million streetscape project is planned for September 26th.

All Detroit Avenue businesses will remain open and accessible throughout the summer. Plenty of parking is available. In addition to side street parking, free parking is located:

- Behind the Gordon Square Arcade just north of Detroit Avenue between West 65th and 67th Streets,
- Behind Gypsy Bean and Baking Company on the corner of West 65th and Detroit
- at a lot on the corner of Detroit and West 61st Street, and
- Luxe Kitchen and Lounge has a parking lot for their customers behind the Pioneer Savings building.

# Sneak Peek Tour

More than 75 friends, supporters and public officials gathered in the Capitol Theatre on Friday, March 13th to get a sneak peek of the renovations and to celebrate the placement of a time capsule inside the theatre lobby. The project developer, Marous Brothers Construction and architect Chris Auvil were on hand to answer questions and accompany guests on tours of the 88 year-old theatre. The Capitol Theatre will reopen with a Grand Gala on Thursday, October 1, 2009, a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday, October 2nd and a full 10 days of special features and give-aways. More information is available at [www.GordonSquare.org](http://www.GordonSquare.org).

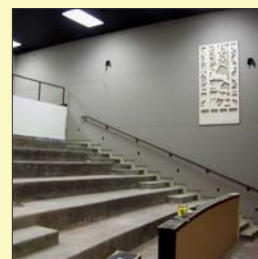
A time capsule containing memorabilia, renovation plans, neighborhood information and more than 200 pictures was placed inside a column in the theatre's lobby for the next generation to find fifty years from now. The items were on display at the Sneak Peek event. After the event, guests were invited to a special preview performance of *Aperture* at Cleveland Public Theatre or stroll through the District's shops and galleries. Neighborhood restaurants Luxe Kitchen and Lounge and Gypsy Beans and Baking Company supplied the event's delectable hors d'oeuvre, desserts and beverages.

## Ohio House Speaker

Armond Budish (left) and Detroit Shoreway Executive Director Jeff Ramsey in the lobby of the Capitol Theatre.



Capitol Theatre memorabilia and the future plans and renderings of the Near West Theatre and Cleveland Public Theatre buildings were on view.



The original Capitol Theatre balcony is being converted into two 100-seat theatres. At the top of this photo, where the projection room used to be, a loge area featuring soft furniture will enhance the movie experience.

# Own a Piece of History

Imagine a set of original Capitol Theatre seats in your home or office! You can purchase sets of two or three of the wooden chairs by contacting the Gordon Square Arts District office at 216-961-4242 ext. 242 or at [www.gordonsquare.org](http://www.gordonsquare.org). The refinished seats come with the original metal side panels inscribed with an "A" representing the Allen family, the theatre's original owners. To meet public theatre fire codes, the old wooden seats are being replaced with new theatre chairs complete with flip-up safety seats and cup holders!



The staging of each production begins with auditions, hours of singing and dancing, anticipation and hope. Each show is adapted to include as many cast members as possible. For example, *Once On This Island*, which runs May 1 – 17, was written for nine people playing multiple roles. NWT has cast 52 actors: fifteen children ages 9-12, 12 teens, 13 young adults (in their 20s), and a dozen adults.

NWT was founded on the belief that the theatre arts can heal, empower, and transform lives. At NWT the personal and communal growth possible when acting, singing and dancing in an ensemble is realized with skilled leadership and loving collaboration.

It is no exaggeration that NWT becomes family to its participants. For example, recently a teenage cast member's father lost his job, necessitating the family's move back to Detroit where they have extended family. Acting like an extended family member, another cast member volunteered to have the teenager stay at her home so that he could finish the show and his school year. This is neighborhood community theatre at its best.

The transformative experience at Near West is so powerful that cast members return to auditions time and again. Many get their family members involved. The current production includes multiple members of several different families.

• Ti Moune, the lead character, is played by Kelcie Dugger, on stage with her twin sister, Monique. Starting at age 12, the twins have been actively involved since 2002. Their 13 year old brother, Jason has been on stage with NWT since age seven and starred as Aladdin in the 2006 production of *Aladdin Jr.* Their mother, Stacey, is an alum of the Cleveland School of the Arts and will be making her NWT debut in *Once On This Island*.

• Josh Andrews brought the friend he met through City Year, Akeem Rollins, into the NWT family. Josh's aunt and uncle are Detroit Shoreway neighborhood residents and have been involved with NWT since 1999. Josh also participates in programs at Cleveland Public Theatre.

• Cherita Miles found NWT through a family member. She had not been on stage since she was a teenager more than 20 years ago. *Once On This Island* is only her second show with NWT, but she already feels completely connected to her new theatre family.

• Elizabeth Allard recently moved back to her home neighborhood after college and brought her roommate with her. Now they are both involved with NWT. Elizabeth's parents met on stage through NWT in 1983. All four of their children have been in NWT productions.

• The brother and sister team of Andy and Grace Schumann are in the cast of *Once*, and their sister Adele will be running the light board. Through her experience with Near West, Adele has decided to study lighting design in college. Their other brother Ben has also been in many NWT productions.

Amazingly, with all of its success and growth, NWT still operates out of a community room on the top floor of a church hall with no air conditioning, no elevator access and limited staging space for sets, actors, and crew. With sufficient funding, NWT's new home in the heart of the Gordon Square Arts District will begin construction. To get involved and/or make a gift or corporate contribution, contact the Gordon Square Arts District office at 216-961-4242.

### Creating the Future of American Theatre at CPT

(continued from page 1)

crafts from professionals at

CPT, then work as a team to create, produce, and perform an original theatrical work. Beginning in July these students take their work to parks throughout Cleveland, providing free performances to the public. In 2008, more than 1,500 children, teens and adults saw the STEP touring performances.

Brick City Theatre is CPT's after-school theatre arts program for children ages 5-14 living in Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority residences. Utilizing local community centers, this program uses theatre as a vehicle to develop self awareness, confidence, conflict resolution, and basic reading and writing skills. Children develop their own plays and perform for the community.

Whether considering world class, original, avant-garde performances or diverse, high-quality educational programs, the future of theatre is at the core of CPT's mission. According to Raymond Bobgan, "If we make well-crafted plays that express the essence of what it is to be human, then theatre will have a future, because this kind of theatre can result in a singular, extraordinary transmission that cannot be sent through the Internet, conveyed by text message, experienced remotely or projected on a screen. It is a deeply personal moment where true magic exists."

— WHY THEATRE? —

Both Near West Theatre and Cleveland Public Theatre have documented higher rates of high school graduation, college entrance, and job attainment for participants in their educational programs and productions. National research on the positive benefits of the Theatre Arts and youth includes the following findings:

*Drama, of all the arts, is most effective in improving the vital academic skills of reading, writing, and verbal communication.<sup>1</sup>*

*Students involved in drama programs score significantly higher on the SAT Verbal component than their counterparts.<sup>2</sup>*

*Arts programs make a significant impact on bridging the gap in academic and job performance between children in inner-city disadvantaged school systems and those in more affluent programs.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> James S. Catterall (UCLA), "Charles Fowler Address-The Arts and Human Development: The Status of the Research," December 2000, Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>2</sup> 2000 College Bound Seniors: A Profile of SAT Program Test Takers, The College Board, 2001, New York, NY.

<sup>3</sup> Edward B. Friske, ed. Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning, The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 1999, Washington, DC.

## Letter from the Executive Director

A few times each week I give a tour of the District to a prospective donor and every time I enter the Capitol Theatre I am amazed at the progress! Without exception, the visitor gasps at the beautifully restored main theatre and responds, "I can't wait to see a movie here!"

Unlike other theatre or arts organizations you may have read about recently, the Gordon Square Arts District is gaining enthusiasm. Championed by great civic leadership, three of the five projects are well underway - the Detroit Avenue streetscape improvements, parking lot acquisition and the restoration of the Capitol Theatre. Soon we will move on to the next big projects - renovating

the Cleveland Public Theatre and constructing a brand new building for Near West Theatre.

But it's not just the economic development aspect of the Gordon Square Arts District that's exciting. The real magic happens inside the Near West Theatre and Cleveland Public Theatre where the personal impact of the theatres' educational and artistic programs transform lives every day. The Gordon Square Arts District will ensure that this life-altering work continues and grows.

I encourage you to witness the impact of live theatre by attending a CPT and NWT performance. Information on their upcoming shows is on the back page of this

newsletter along with other great events going on in the District. Join the excitement!

Joy Roller  
Executive Director



## SAVE THESE DATES:

### The Capitol Theatre Grand Opening is Coming Soon!

West 65th St. & Detroit Avenue  
Cleveland's only West Side art  
and independent film cinema

**Thursday, October 1**  
Gala

#### GSAD Red Carpet Benefit

Including: a special edition of *WVIZ's Applause*  
program about the Capitol Theatre's history, an  
intermission dessert buffet sponsored by Charter  
One, and a full length feature film hand-selected  
by Cleveland Cinemas.

**Friday, October 2**  
11 AM Ribbon Cutting  
7 PM Feature Film Event

**Saturday, October 3**  
Children's Matinee

**Saturday, October 3-**  
**Sunday, October 11**  
Grand Opening Week

Full movie schedule  
Give-Aways & Special Promotions

Tickets will be available soon for the Gala. Check  
[www.GordonSquare.org](http://www.GordonSquare.org). to watch the "Gasp!"  
video tribute to the Capitol restoration project and  
see opportunities for your company to sponsor  
the benefit.



### MADE IN THE 216

[roomservicecleveland.com](http://roomservicecleveland.com)

**June 26 & 27**

It's a great way to support your  
local community!  
Featuring items made in our area.

- 4 locations in the Gordon  
Square Arts District
- 37 vendors  
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### Cleveland Public Theatre

[cptonline.org](http://cptonline.org)

#### Dance Works '09

May 7 - 10  
Ohio Dance Theatre  
May 14 - 17  
Double-Edge Dance  
May 21 - 24  
Open Window Dance  
Company

#### Cut To Pieces

May 14-30  
Written by  
Raymond Bobgan and Chris  
Seibert



### NEAR WEST THEATRE

[nearwesttheatre.org](http://nearwesttheatre.org)

#### Once On This Island

May 1 - 17  
Book and Lyrics By  
Lynn Ahrens  
Music By Stephen  
Flaherty

#### Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

July 17 - August 2  
Music and Lyrics by  
Stephen Sondheim  
Book by Hugh  
Wheeler



The 78th Street  
Studios Experience  
[78streetstudios.com](http://78streetstudios.com)

**Friday, July 10,**  
**5:30-9:00pm**

**Saturday, July 11,**  
**1:00-5:00pm**

Discover west side  
Cleveland's largest  
arts center anchoring  
the west end of Gordon  
Square Arts District!  
Explore our eclectic  
mix of world class art  
galleries, studios &  
creative businesses  
evolving together in  
perfect synergy.

## GORDON SQUARE FARMERS MARKET (Every Saturday, July 11-October 24, 9am-1pm)

On the corner of West 65th Street and West Clinton, one block south of Detroit Avenue | [gordonsquaremarket@gmail.com](mailto:gordonsquaremarket@gmail.com) for more info

**July 11 - Opening Day - Berry & Ice Cream Social**

**September 26 - Oktoberfest**

**August 22 - Sweet Corn Fest**

**October 24 - Harvest Halloween Autumn Fest**



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[www.gordonsquare.org](http://www.gordonsquare.org)



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