

Gettysburg Times Progress 2021
Gettysburg College's Majestic Theater

By Jeffrey Gabel, Founding Executive Director

“Be Safe. Be Kind. Be Hopeful” was the message I quickly scrawled on a piece of paper and handed to the crew to put on the marquee shortly after the Majestic Theater closed March 13, 2020. With anxiety and uncertainty at a high in Adams County, we wanted to convey optimism. The next day, I posted a photo of the marquee on the League of Historic American Theatres’ online message board, which connects nearly 400 members nationwide. Within days our marquee message went viral with dozens of theater marquees nationwide offering the same words of hope. Although COVID-19 has forced a long intermission for Gettysburg College’s Majestic Theater, the theater’s staff keeps those simple words in mind while preparing for the safe return of performing arts and cinema.

Vibrant New Programs

The first few months of 2020 were packed with new events and partnerships, building momentum for the future. On January 25, the Majestic hosted the 40th anniversary of Gettysburg’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration with a free concert, “We Shall Overcome,” by nationally renowned African American musician Damien Sneed. The auditorium was filled to capacity thanks to our collaboration with Gettysburg College’s Offices of Diversity and Inclusion and College Life and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Committee.

A week later, nearly 300 people attended the first presentation of Mountainfilm on Tour, short films showcasing adventure, the environment and the human spirit, direct from the Mountainfilm festival in Telluride, Colorado. The annual festival and tour have temporarily halted in-person presentations, but in the future, this will be an annual event.

In early March, artist Frances Wolf opened her exhibit of paintings, “Stretching Visions,” in the Majestic’s art gallery. Wolf is the First Lady of Pennsylvania and a highly regarded artist. We regret there was little time for the public to enjoy her work before the theater closed.

Pandemic Pivot

When Broadway went dark in mid-March, performing arts centers across the country, including the Majestic, quickly followed. In the immediate aftermath our daily cinemas closed,

and staff rescheduled or cancelled live performances for the remainder of the 2019-2020 season. Eventually the 2020 Summer Classic Movies series and the 2020-21 season – for which planning was well underway – were also wiped from the calendar.

Fortunately, the Majestic Theater is owned and operated by Gettysburg College, which kept our full-time staff working to temporarily transform the entire facility into classrooms and expanded rehearsal spaces for Gettysburg College students and faculty last fall and this spring. We are saddened that we have not been able to provide work to the majority of our part-time staff. We also miss seeing our loyal volunteers who make so much of what we do possible.

In addition, the Majestic stayed in touch with our loyal patrons, including at popular monthly curbside popcorn sales throughout the fall. While the cinemas remain closed, the Majestic offers an intriguing lineup of films – available to stream anytime – on our website through MAJESTIC MOVIES AT HOME.

Successful 95th Birthday Campaign

One of the opportunities stolen by the pandemic was the chance to celebrate the Majestic's 95th Birthday together on November 14, 2020. However, the theater received a wonderful birthday gift: a \$100,000 matching grant from Hanover's J. William Warehime Foundation to establish a theatrical equipment endowment. To raise matching funds, the Majestic Theater ran a crowdfunding campaign throughout November. We were amazed by the results: to date we have received 126 gifts totaling \$87,000. This endowment will allow the theater to maintain and upgrade its lighting, sound and projection systems.

Looking to 2021

The Majestic Theater is again in use this semester by Gettysburg College classes and rehearsals. The facility offers ample space to achieve academic goals while safely distanced.

Once the semester ends, the Majestic plans to re-open daily cinemas by Memorial Day. These plans are contingent on the course of local virus infection rates and vaccination efforts. We will not be able to reopen the historic stage for our live Celebrity Series until the state allows for 100 percent seating capacity. The performing arts industry worldwide has been dramatically affected by the pandemic, and it will take time for touring artists to work out the logistics needed to safely perform at venues nationwide.

Our latest cinema and performance news is posted on our website at www.gettysburgmajestic.org, on social media at Facebook and Instagram, and through our email newsletter. Sign up for the newsletter on our website.