



Long Island Press
Serving the opinion leaders of Long Island



Exit Stage Left- June 18, 2009

One Of L.I.'s Most Revered And Beloved Venues Shuts Its Doors

By Dana Filipowski



For 26 years, the Inter-Media Arts Centre (IMAC) Theater stood as a symbol of what downtown Huntington represents—a uniquely Long Island cultural icon that served as a small slice of New York City.

Now that icon is gone.

“At the time, only classical music was being performed and edgy music was only found in the city,” says Michael Rothbard, who founded the IMAC in Bayville in 1974 and moved it to an abandoned vintage theater on New York Avenue in 1983 with his partner, Kathy Bodily. “We brought this music to Long Island,” says Rothbard, rattling off some names that have adorned the marquee, including Richie Havens, Leo Kottke, Phoebe Snow, Ani DiFranco and Johnny Winter. A nonprofit arts center that went beyond the mainstream, IMAC was an innovator when it debuted—offering an intimate concert experience with exceptional sound quality and world-class artists—and numerous others across LI have followed in the footsteps of the Huntington original, such as the Boulton Center in Bay Shore and the Westhampton Performing Arts Center.

The effects of this influence were noted in a farewell statement issued by Rothbard, Bodily and the IMAC staff: “In the last few years, a number of townships have revitalized their abandoned theater ‘eye-sores’ into successful venues, and a number of universities are regularly presenting programming echoing the IMAC model. Now the music and artists that we first brought to Long Island can be found at many of the new venues and we feel we are not pioneering any longer.”

A somber mood lurked in the air amongst those staffers aware of the impending closure at the last concert, featuring Bobby Caldwell, earlier this month.

“It’s a real shame,” says Dylan Skolnick, manager of Huntington’s Cinema Arts Centre, another cultural beacon in the neighborhood. “It is a great loss that will be fantastically missed by myself and the community.”

Rothbard notes that IMAC is not closing because of declining ticket sales; in fact, Rothbard says that the last six shows at the venue were sold out. “The building pushed us out,” says Rothbard, adding that the decaying building is too old and unsafe to continue staging performances there. “A 60-pound piece of plaster nearly fell on a staff member,” he says. This was at the top of a list of causes for the venue closing its doors, along with declining donations, increasing operations costs and the changes in the arts scene on LI.

Although the IMAC will be missed, Rothbard assures that he and Bodily will not be disappearing from the LI landscape anytime soon: They are currently working on new-media models to bring the arts to Long Islanders. Furthermore, the duo and the Town of Huntington are working on possibly bringing another performing arts center back to Huntington.

“IMAC’s quarter-century here exemplifies how Huntington embraces the arts, and we look forward to working with IMAC to bring a new, world-class performing arts center to Long Island’s arts capital,” said Town of Huntington Supervisor Frank Petrone in a statement. Petrone has directed his cultural affairs director to put together a group of arts representatives to assess their options.

Even though many are sad to see the IMAC close, Rothbard assures patrons of the venue that the future is bright. “This is not an unhappy thing to us,” he says. “We are taking our skills and using them to continue to serve Long Island.”