

SPOTLIGHT

# PARAMOUNT



# IMPORTANCE

AT 90, DENVER'S PARAMOUNT THEATRE IS STILL ADDING TO ITS STORY

BY JAMES ZOLTAK

**P**ARAMOUNT THEATRE, AN art deco gem in downtown Denver, marked its 90th anniversary in August. There was little fanfare for the occasion because of the coronavirus pandemic, but it's a venue whose history deserves to be celebrated.

The building, designed by noted Colorado architect Temple Buell for Publix Theatres, earned a spot on the National Register of Historic Places and status as a city landmark in 1980 and 1988, respectively. Chicago-based architecture firm Rapp & Rapp, whose work includes the Kings Theatre in Brooklyn, N.Y., and the Chicago Theatre, designed the theater itself. The theater features a Wurlitzer twin-console organ that's one of only two in the U.S. The other resides at Radio City

Music Hall in New York.

Built in 1930 as a movie house, the theater now features concerts and other live entertainment and has been owned and operated by Kroenke Sports & Entertainment since 2002. The company, whose Denver assets includes Ball Arena (formerly Pepsi Center), Dick's Sporting Goods Park, the NHL's Colorado Avalanche, the NBA's Denver Nuggets and MLS' Colorado Rapids, has been dedicated to preserving Paramount's history while keeping it a vibrant part of the area's present.

Jennifer Nordhues, Paramount's director of venue marketing and publicity, says being part of KSE, which also owns radio stations and a regional television network, allows the venue to leverage those holdings and market events on Ball Arena and Dick's Sporting Goods Park concourses as well as share other resources.

VenuesNow's James Zoltak

caught up with General Manager Chris Goddard for a look at the theater's distant and recent past and what the future holds for the 1,870-seat venue.

**The theater itself is an attraction and a part of history. How important is that in terms of drawing artists and people to events at the venue?**

It's the only remaining historic seated theater in Denver, originally a part of Denver's downtown historic theater district. It's got a lot of history from back in the '30s. It speaks to a lot of Denverites' experiences. We've been blessed where a lot of people who were born here in Colorado get to come to the theater with their grandparents to experience the venue (they experienced) when they were children as well. Everyone from Frank Sinatra in the '60s to Janelle Monáe, Bruce Springsteen, Leon Bridges and

Eddie Vedder have all graced our stage. With that, there comes a certain vibe when you come and play the room (that) I don't think you can re-create anywhere else in Denver. The architecture, art deco, it's absolutely incredible inside the room. It's one of a kind in downtown Denver certainly and throughout Colorado, and only one of a few (theaters) in Colorado that has maintained its historical integrity throughout the years. Unfortunately, a lot of these type of theaters have been torn down. We're blessed to have Paramount still standing. I think because of that we're able to attract a wide range of artists. Everyone (from those) looking for a typical seated theater to those that might look for an elevated vibe where when you play the room you're looking out from the stage and you can just feel the history breathing from the walls, and Paramount brings that to the table.

MICHAEL MARTIN, DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY



# PARAMOUNT THEATRE

## MILE HIGH NUMBERS

All data based on figures supplied to Pollstar dating back to February 1982.

**TOTAL SHOWS:** 761

**TOTAL GROSS:** \$43,361,750

**TOTAL TICKETS SOLD:** 1,091,605

### Top grossing and best attended multiple-date event

Rob Becker's "Defending the Caveman"

Nov. 3-13, 2004

**GROSS:** \$445,756

**TICKETS SOLD:** 11,359

**NO. OF SHOWS:** 10

**TICKET PRICES:** \$25.50-\$45.50

**PROMOTER:** House of Blues Concerts

### Top grossing one-show engagement

Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons

Jan. 18, 2019

**GROSS:** \$209,622

**TICKETS:** 1,818

**NO. OF SHOWS:** 1

**TICKET PRICES:** \$65-\$145

**PROMOTER:** In-house promotion

COURTESY PARAMOUNT THEATRE

"Everyone that works at the building loves it and the building needs a lot of love. ... We've got an engineering team on site, staff that works every day, and a lot of partners outside of that within Colorado that help us make sure that every little tweak that we do in the building maintains that historical integrity, but also elevates it and brings it into the 21st century in terms of the mechanics of the room."

—Chris Goddard





**So you find artists are enthused about doing shows at the Paramount, given its majesty?**

We have artists that come back year after year. STS9 has tied us to their Red Rocks (Amphitheatre) shows the past couple of years. We certainly have a strong name and brand in the market for comedians looking to play a room in that 1,200- to 2,000-cap range. We've been able to establish ourselves in a highly competitive market. I think that artists when they come to Colorado, there's a lot of rock rooms, a lot of clubs and not a lot of historic theaters. Artists right now are really looking for something. When they look at Paramount, (they see) something outside of the box where they can play a historic room that has a vibe that you can't re-create, that has this history in the walls. When they discover that Paramount exists in Denver, after having played some of these clubs or playing a comedy club or more of a traditional rock room or something that's a convention center, they're really amazed that this venue still exists. We're right in the middle of downtown Denver, so it's the perfect location. Certainly we have our newbies, and those that play the stage walk away saying, "I can't believe this exists here." It speaks a lot to our staff and the quality of work they produce on their end, but we're lucky enough that when artists leave, that word spreads up to agents, back to the promoters, the managers and they want to come back year after year. It's



**TOP: STS9 performs at the theater in September 2019. ABOVE: A piece of the ornate decoration inside the theater.**

something we've been working on growing over the past six, seven years as well. You certainly see that in the numbers, starting at around 60 shows and (we've) grown up to 150 this past year.

**It seems like a Western version of Radio City Music Hall in some ways.**

New York's got a few of them, whether it's United Palace, the Beacon (Theatre). On the flipside, we love the Wiltern (Theatre) out in L.A. I think Paramount's kind of similar, between those. It's still a seated theater so a lot like Radio City and the Beacon, but we do have a convertible floor so we are able to do some shows and open up that pit, kind of similar to the Wiltern where they have that open floor space out there.

**What can you tell me about loading in and out, rigging**

**and lighting capabilities for acts coming in?**

Paramount was originally built as a movie house and because of that our stage depth is fairly limited, including our wing space, but we're able to highlight what we offer with elevated equipment. We've got an L-Acoustics K2 rig that hangs and that's our in-house audio. We've got a lot of movers, Lekos, an incredible lighting rig. We outsource our audio so that the person renting the equipment is also working the equipment. The best person behind that equipment is going to be your audio tech when you come to the venue. I think, as it relates to those kinds of highlights it really helps elevate some of the downsides to the venue, being a smaller stage. Being right downtown, we have the luck of being backed up to a parking lot. So even though we are downtown we're kind of against an alley. Loading in and out is fairly easy for the kind of venue that we are and we're able to bring trucks right up to our loading door and load equipment straight onto the stage. A lot of tours that are new to our venue often think that it's going to take five, six hours to load in and it ends up taking half that time because we're able to pull the truck up so close to the stage.

**Have you guys expanded or done anything new and interesting with food and beverage service? I know a lot of theaters in general have expanded offerings and let people take food and drinks to their seats.**

We've always let patrons bring their drinks and food back to their

seats. We operate somewhere between your traditional performing arts center and your rock house and because of that we've offered some really elevated experiences on the food and beverage side, whether that's kind of a cocktail experience or the service tends to be a little more like a rock room than a PAC. I don't think anyone's waiting in line too long. We recently went over to Legends to operate concessions and they've done a great job in taking over the room and really making sure the patron experience is elevated and bringing in some new products to highlight what we offer behind the bar.

**What is the theater's main niche? How do you position it in the Denver market?**

We've really done a great job with comedy over the years. I'd say we're the go-to seated theater for comedy. We've developed a really great brand for the venue surrounding comedy. Within that vein, we're starting to see that bleed into events like podcasts and some other talking head-style events, but over the past few years we've also been working hard to expand that brand to artists that might be outside Paramount's niche or traditional realm of singer-songwriter or classic rock. We've done a really good job over the years bringing in artists like Janelle Monáe, Camila Cabello, Thom Yorke... that maybe on the rest of the tour you're seeing that they are playing some rooms that are a little bit more like traditional rock rooms. We've been able to open our doors (to them) and I feel done a great job in bringing



**THANK YOU DENVER FOR 90 YEARS**

**SPECIAL THANKS TO THE ARTISTS, AGENTS, MANAGERS,  
PROMOTERS, AND FANS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED  
PARAMOUNT THEATRE ACROSS ITS STORIED HISTORY.**

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**KSE**



those artists to the stage, working with the promoters, artists and agents to make a comfortable and easy experience for those artists as well.

### **Is the theater home to any performing arts groups in dance, opera, orchestra?**

Paramount being built originally as a movie house, as I mentioned, the stage depth is pretty short so it makes it really hard to accommodate some of those traditional Broadway or dance sets that they have. You don't have the wing space or the depth to fly those sets in and out or bring them in and out. Traditionally, it's never been one of those rooms that's done a lot of Broadway or dance. We do have an annuity with Moscow Ballet and a few events like that that love the room and we work really well with, but where we are strong and we kind of keep the tradition of a movie house is, we do Warren Miller (ski films). We're one of their big stops every year. The Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour, we sell out three nights every year. Colorado being a big outdoor community, there's a lot of outdoor film festivals that come through our room that we work closely with. So, when we talk about the tradition of the room and what it was built for, we certainly hold true with that, with some of the film festivals that we continue to bring through year over year.

### **How much of a challenge is it to maintain the glory of the venue from a maintenance and renovation standpoint? Is it a constant effort?**

Everyone that works at the building loves it and the building needs a lot of love. Over the years we've made a lot of mechanical improvements and certainly maintained the upkeep of the room, but a lot of what we're working with is outdated within the room. It's old equipment. It's not replaceable. So, when we come across something in the venue that maybe needs that kind of extra love, it's not just replacing one pipe in the room, it's replacing the entire boiler or HVAC unit because it's maybe from the '70s or '50s or still from the '30s. So, from that aspect, it needs an incredible amount of love and we've got an incredible amount of support from the staff. We've got an engineering team on site, staff that works every day, and a lot of partners outside of that within Colorado that help us

make sure that every little tweak that we do in the building maintains that historical integrity but also elevates it and brings it into the 21st century in terms of the mechanics of the room.

### **Is the venue open to any promoter or do you work exclusively with one or more?**

We're an open room. We have great relationships with all the big players as well as all the small players. We make sure that this room's available to anyone that wants to play it. We feel we have to have good relationships with all the promoters out there. We really try to not align ourselves with any one promoter, and I think that has contributed to a large part of Paramount's success. The majority of the events we do are promoted by outside promoters, so it's important to us to maintain those strong relationships with everybody from AEG to Live Nation to some smaller players like Danny Zelisko in Arizona, National Artists out on the East Coast. I think it's something that we've done really well.

### **I saw that Sinbad recorded an HBO comedy special there back in the day, in '96. Has the venue done anything in terms of taped live shows in ensuing years?**

We're actually working on a couple coming up that as soon as we are able to present them and the artist is comfortable coming through, we're excited to help present to the world and offer that to the artist. In the past we've filmed Tom Segura live onstage, we've done T.J. Miller, Brian Regan. And that has happened in the span of about four years. Once

we kind of developed this brand for comedy and really being a go-to house for that kind of style of event, artists really became drawn to our room. I will say that has so much to do with the Denver community. There's such a strong comedy community out here — and a shoutout to Comedy Works for helping to develop that. I think that more than anything is why we're seeing such an uptick in filming happening within Denver, these specials we've filmed here. We've been happy to be a beneficiary of a lot of that.

### **How important is it to the present and future of the venue to have Kroenke Sports & Entertainment as its owner in terms of preserving the venue and keeping it economically viable?**


Ownership values the historical integrity of the building and has been extremely supportive in making sure we maintain (certain) aspects of the venue. They recognize its importance within the Denver and Colorado community and keeping that is a top priority for our company. With some recent renovations we've made, we worked with architects who specialize in historic buildings in the area, in Denver, that can speak specifically to the art deco architecture of that period of the building. Making sure that we work with those kinds of partners is extremely important to our ownership and our company. An example is we recently renovated our restrooms and discovered the original terrazzo floor underneath the tile that we were tearing up. Once we discovered that we pivoted and made sure that the design of the bathrooms reflected

that original terrazzo flooring. We brought someone in to help restore that flooring so that we were able to keep that as part of the renovation. Making sure that we maintain those aspects with a long-term vision for the future of this building has been what I believe is a huge draw for artists, promoters, agent and managers when they look at the Paramount Theatre.

### **Is there any cooperation between the Paramount and other KSE assets like Ball Arena (formerly Pepsi Center, home of the KSE-owned Denver Nuggets of the NBA and Colorado Avalanche of the NHL) and Dick's Sporting Goods Park (home of the MLS Colorado Rapids)?**

Having a company as large as KSE within downtown Denver allows us to lean on the company's overall relationships with city officials and some of those entities who we're in constant contact with. Additionally, the NBA, the NHL and Ball Arena all working together at the beginning of every season, looking at operations and how to improve them, we've got the benefit of having the trickle-down effect from there and looking to Ball Arena for what kind of security operations are going to improve over the next year, what kind of concessions improvements are people looking to make. With large organizations like that, we get to lean on those relationships to be able to benefit from a lot of that.

### **I'm curious about the Wurlitzer. Does it ever get dusted off and put into action?**

We've got a really good relationship with the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the American Theater Organ Society. It's a group of folks that actually come down and maintain our organ. This organ is the sister organ of the one that sits in Radio City Music Hall. ... We actually have the benefit of them coming out and playing the organ a couple of times a year. Actually, for our Banff Film Festival they come out and play the organ for the walk-in music right before the first film comes on every night. They lower the organ, kind of like a scene out of "Phantom of the Opera," and really make those pipes ring. It's certainly a great attribute of our venue. Not a lot of original historic venues like this still have a working organ inside their venue. 



**SPECIAL GUEST:** Thom Yorke of Radiohead is among the artists who have played the Paramount in recent years.