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Dragon Theatre takes its show on the road *Palo Alto theater company plans to move to a larger space in Redwood City*

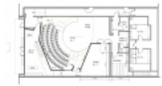
by Rebecca Wallace
Palo Alto Weekly Staff



After six years in downtown Palo Alto, the **Dragon Theatre** is moving out and up to a space twice as large in Redwood City.

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The planned new home is in the downtown theater district, neighboring the historic Fox Theatre and the smaller Club Fox, as well as the Century 20 cineplex. Dragon founder and artistic director Meredith Hagedorn plans to transform a vacant 4,600-square-foot space into a 70-seat theater with a mezzanine.



While Hagedorn is still obtaining the necessary permits, she said that Redwood City officials seem very friendly to the arts and have been exceedingly welcoming.

"Our Realtor has said, 'I feel like I'm presenting the queen,'" Hagedorn said. "It's just been so smooth."

Still, the move will be bittersweet. Hagedorn, who lives in Mountain View, said she had hoped to keep her theater company in Palo Alto. But she couldn't find a suitable, affordable space that was zoned correctly and didn't have any potential parking problems.



The parking crunch in downtown Palo Alto is one of the reasons Dragon is leaving, she said. "We schedule around parking." In addition, the theater never attracted the "walk-by" traffic she had hoped for in a downtown, and many people drove by the small theater's Alma Street location without noticing it.

Hagedorn said she has a good relationship with her landlord and has been able to pay Palo Alto rent, with the added income that came from renting out the Dragon space for classes and other performances. But the theater's lease is up at the end of 2012, and Hagedorn wasn't confident that she'd be able to pay any increases.

"We have maxed out our revenue potential with 42 seats," she said of her petite theater.

Hagedorn declined to give specifics on current and future rents, but she said the increase in the Redwood City space would be "proportional," given that the venue is larger.

"It's a leap of faith, but that's what businesses do when they want to expand," she said. "We've done lots of number-crunching."

At the moment, the new location at 2120 Broadway -- at Theatre Way -- is an open space with a partial mezzanine and plenty of parking. Once a travel agency, it has been vacant for several years. Dragon plans to build the other part of the mezzanine to use for VIP seating, and put in a round stage 20 feet in diameter.

The plans drawn up by Chiu Lao Architecture Design of Oakland also include: dressing rooms, a private restroom for actors, a small workroom, a downstairs studio and an upstairs classroom, and an actual backstage area -- a first for Dragon. The backstage space in Palo Alto also serves as the dressing room/classroom/dance studio.

The theater will share its public restrooms with neighboring offices and a sushi restaurant, which Hagedorn doesn't seem to mind. She's looking forward to having patrons come to the area for a meal and a show. This seems increasingly possible in a spruced-up downtown that was sleepy and dingy in years past. Now the city also has a large array of free summer concerts and outdoor movies in its revamped Courthouse Square across from the Fox.

Hagedorn is looking forward to being neighbors with Broadway By the Bay, the theater company that took up residence at the Fox last year. That group has a very different niche, putting on blockbuster musicals while Dragon does quirky, often little-known plays.

To fund the move, Dragon has launched a capital campaign, aiming to bring in donations totaling \$400,000. That amount will cover the construction project and provide a buffer for a decrease in the operating budget in the near future, Hagedorn said. The company is working hard to solicit donations from supporters and subscribers.

If all goes according to plan, construction would start on July 1 and finish in the fall. Hagedorn is planning an open house on July 7 to show off the new space and give a preview of next year's season. Dragon would then have two more productions in Palo Alto before starting the new season in Redwood City in January 2013.

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Comments

Posted by LenW, a resident of the Crescent Park neighborhood, on Jun 5, 2012 at 11:48 am

Best of Luck, Meredith - you deserve it!