

# distractions

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## THE IMPACT OF EPAC

Eugene, Sept. 24, 1982.

*Long black and silver limousines roll up to the sidewalk. Men in black ties and ladies in long gowns sashay through the doors and are lost in the crowd. Huge spotlights swing about, cutting the night with their blazing beams. The Eugene Performing Arts Center is ready for its opening performance.*

When The Eugene Performing Arts Center (EPAC) opens its doors for the first time this fall, many people will marvel. Others will worry.

The \$25 million facility is bound to have an enormous effect on the local arts community, local businesses, future employees and the Eugene audience at large. What these effects will be can only be seen after the center is in full operation, and the grand opening hoopla has given way to the everyday grind. Here, however, are a few educated guesses.

### AWARENESS OF THE ARTS

One of the few things most people in the arts community agree on is that the performing arts center will generate a new public awareness and interest in the performing arts. Riley Grannan, one of the creative directors of the Eugene Ballet, says he thinks this awareness will be an important asset. "The more dance is seen, the more converts we'll have."

"The main thing we're trying to do," says Luke Bandle, public relations director for EPAC, "is to train people to come into town in the evenings. People in Eugene are TV people. They're used to spending the evenings watching the cable. We need to get them used to including the performing arts in their lives."

Will this interest in the arts result in an upswing in local arts? Although many people think so, others are not so sure.

### COMPETITION FROM NATIONAL ACTS

There are not enough local arts groups in Eugene to fill the 3,500 seats of EPAC's two auditoriums every night, which means imported talent will also be a big part of the Eugene arts scene in the future. Will this spell death for local groups that are now struggling to sell enough tickets to cover their bills, without having to compete with road acts? Will audiences shell out \$20 to see the Eugene Ballet when they could have the Royal Winnipeg Ballet at the same price?

Bandle says the competition will be

healthy. "Competition is exciting. If you don't have someone better than you come and play, you have no yardstick to go from."

But there is a financial side of the national competition question, one which worries David Lunney, producing director of the Oregon Repertory Theatre (ORT).

"Road events are fine," says Lunney. "They're a natural component of the arts center. But they take money out of the community. Suppose Elvis came in, took \$100,000, and everyone had a great time. But the next day, Elvis is gone, and we have \$100,000 less in the community."

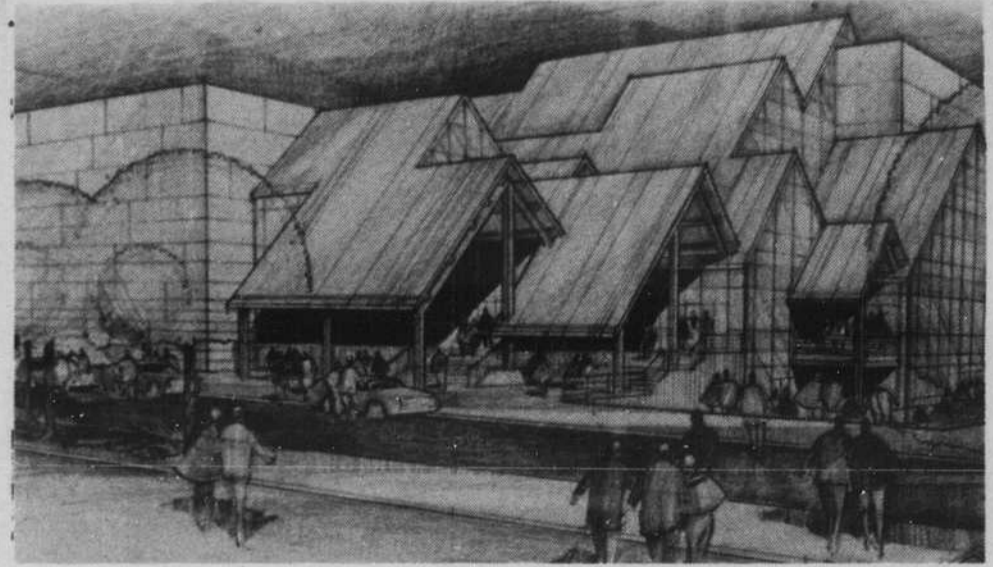
"It's like building a silk factory, with all the machines and equipment. Then you say 'did anybody get any worms?' No, they didn't. Did anyone think about raising them here? No, we have to buy them, and then return them when we're done with them. That's no way to do business."

"What we need to do," says Lunney, "is make this an export business rather than an import business. No matter what you like to think, this is a business, and we've got to invest in our product... a competitive product attractive to tourists."

### BUCKS: TOURISTS'

Others feel that the EPAC will prove to be an import business, as people from all over the Willamette valley flock to the center to see events, and leave their money in nearby restaurants, hotels and stores.

Dick Reynolds, Executive Director of EPAC, estimates that this tourist



money will amount to approximately eight or nine million dollars, which will be "turned over" in Eugene cash registers three or four times, leaving an end effect of up to \$27 million.

The central question is whether the performing arts center will be able to attract enough large audiences to keep it alive financially. Bandle is confident. "People say we're going to have a white elephant on our hands," she says. "I say no, we've got a white horse that we're going to ride to economic victory."

Others have their doubts. Although Bandle says that EPAC is striving to make a portion of the tickets available

for under \$10 for most events, a fact sheet for the center says that only 228 of the large auditorium's 2,523 seats have been set aside for low cost tickets. The current recession spreads far outside the Eugene city limits, and many people can't afford their rent, much less \$20 to see Marvin Hamlisch at the EPAC.

"Tourism is subject to the same hazards as other industries. It won't protect us from the economic downturn that's hurting the forest products industry," said Jack Ohm of the Eugene Downtown Association at an OSPIRG-sponsored forum on the EPAC opening held Saturday at the University.

### BUCKS: ARTISTS'

Another financial problem with the center is that local arts groups may find their budgets don't go as far in the huge, professionally-oriented EPAC auditorium as they did in the smaller, volunteer-oriented situations. The ORT, for instance, recently announced that it will not be able to afford to put on shows at EPAC, despite heavily discounted rent rates for local arts groups. "It's the cost of producing in there. In a brand new 500-seat theater, you've got to produce a production that looks like it belongs in a brand new 500-seat theater."

As a result, production costs would be two to three times what they are for current productions, costs the ORT can't afford. "You can go in there, and everyone loves the first show, but when you balance the books, where are you? You can't keep on doing two-person plays all season," says Lunney.

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## 7th Ave. frieze-out: a preview

EPAC Operations Director David Pelletier calls the center "the Ferrari of concert halls," and from all accounts, the label fits. Combining state-of-the-art technology and old-fashioned craftsmanship, the center is a pleasure to the eyes and the ears.

Our tour starts as we cross the ramp from the parking structure into the main building. Black circles on the walls gradually become mirrorized, reflecting splotches of color from our clothing as we pass. We enter the building to see huge Douglas fir beams spread across a wide, open air lobby, with transparent and opaque walls.

Works of art are all around the

place. A frieze of ceramic masks extend in a line across the wall, coming to face level as we descend the cantilevered stairs. A bronze umbrella leans against a wall, as if someone left it by accident. A fused glass work shines above the ticket windows. A small room off the main lobby is wallpapered in sheet music, and a stick figure in the center racks its brain in search of the missing chord.

The large auditorium is a work of art in itself. A 52 by 58 foot stage, the largest in the Pacific Northwest, commands the view of over 2,500 seats. If the excellent acoustics don't carry the performer's sound well enough, a 6,000 watt sound system is

sure to help.

The stage curtain, a 40 by 60 foot sheet of mauve tones, features 14 foot blackberry bushes, silver-lined clouds and, of course, Oregon rain. The ceiling is a green basket-weave design with gold leaf edging.

The small theater is equally impressive. 500 seats face a smaller, less formal stage. The small theater is set up to handle dances, movies, plays, or music events, with excellent lighting and sound systems.

As we end our tour, it is fitting that we glance down at one more piece of artwork near the exit: a torn ticket stub, cast in bronze, lies discarded on the floor.

by matt meyer