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Photo by Jeff Paslay

Lamont has shown films for 12 years in a building that was designed by the first dean of the University's architecture school and built by students.

**BIJOU**  
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From the moment the Bijou comes into sight, it's obvious that it isn't a typical theater.

It's housed in the Willcox Building near campus at 492 E. 13th Ave. Bijou owner Michael Lamont says University students and faculty make up about half of the audience for the movies he shows. The connection with the University is one that goes way back to the building's construction in 1925, which was a school project of sorts.

Walter Willcox, the first dean of the University's School of Architecture, designed laid the plans for the building at the request of the First Congregational Church, which needed a place to call its own.

Students in the architecture department put the building together and their pencil marks and stencils can still be seen on the beams in the theater lobby. The high-ceilinged main theater is in what used to be chapel.

When membership swelled beyond the building's capacity in the mid-1950's, the church found itself a new home and yet another group with a focus on the afterlife settled into the Willcox Building.

The McGaffey-Andreason mortuary set up shop in 1956, but it too moved on to a different building, in the late 1970's, as business grew. Lamont says someone wanted to turn it into a wedding chapel at that point, "but I guess it was a little too much for people who had had someone ready to be buried there."

In 1979, the building was bought by Charles Hoffman, who converted the east side of it into office space that still exists and built a small auditorium which would become the Bijou's second screen area.

But the lower part of it remained empty for a couple of years.

Lamont, meanwhile, was a computer science major at the University who spent some of his time catching foreign films, independent films and classics at Cinema 7 and Waco theaters. But the people who owned Waco lost the lease in

1980. Williams Bakery promptly bought that chunk of land, just east of campus. And Cinema 7, which often featured classics, lost the battle with the video monster, as Lamont calls it, and closed down in 1987.

An interest in films had prompted Lamont to develop a collection of his own and he showed those films as a way to raise money for a science group he was involved in and to help out a small business owner who was having rent trouble. She suggested that Lamont look into showing films for a living at an empty building down street.

The Bijou Theatre opened its doors on Oct. 15, 1980.

Upscale theaters show films — for better or worse — with big budgets and big stars and big audience drawing power. Those are the places that get offered such films first. Theaters like the Bijou get what's left over.

"Anything they don't want or what's left that's not commercial enough for them is where I come in," Lamont says.

That means some really awful things get passed up and sent Lamont's way. But he also gets a lot of jewels with recent thrillers like *One False Move* and *Zentropa* and documentaries such as *Incident at Oglala* and *The Famine Within*. No big stars or big budgets there, just outstanding film-making.

You really can't miss with movies at the Bijou. Small films, foreign films, independent films, out-of-the-ordinary films — they're all there. And Lamont says Eugene has turned out to be a great place to show such movies.

"The University's here so the I.Q. per capita is at least slightly higher than the typical town," he says. "There's a lot of interest in good films here."

Lamont gave his theater a name that means jewel or light in French, even though the Bijou isn't really all that much to look at. It shows its age in ways that aren't all complimentary and it's hardly one those flashy movie houses with tuxedoed ushers.

Take a look at the movies that play there and see why the name fits.

**'Eugene Onegin' opens Portland Opera**  
Four stars of the Kazan Opera in the Tatarstan republic join American basso Jerome Hines this weekend in Portland Opera's 1992-92 season opener *Eugene Onegin*. The Tchaikovsky masterpiece, based on Pushkin's poem, will play Sept. 26 and 30 and Oct. 3 at 7:30 p.m. at Portland's Civic Auditorium.  
The opera probes the anguish of unrequited love, betrayed friendship and fated misalliances in 19th century Czarist Russia. Powerfully stirring melodies, opulent sets and costumes and themes as real today as they were then come together to create this compelling story of protocol and its price.  
The opera is conducted by Imre Pallo, directed by Christopher Mattaliano and features the Portland Opera Orchestra and Chorus.  
Tickets, at \$19.50, \$29.50, \$36, \$46 and \$51, can be charged by phone at 241-1802 (9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays) or 1-800-745-0888 (days, evenings, weekends). Tickets can also be purchased at the ticket office at 1516 S.W. Alder in Portland, or from GI Joe TicketMaster Outlets.