

A cinema off the beaten path

The Bijou Theatre, not a traditional moviehouse, has a unique ambience and shows unusual films

By Kim Weiss

Assistant Entertainment Editor

Once a theater, always a theater? Not in this case. Once a church, then a funeral parlor and now a theater.

The Bijou Theatre, at 492 E. 13th Ave., originally stood as the First Congregational Church of Eugene.

W.B. Willcox, the former dean of the University's School of Architecture and Allied Arts from 1923 to 1947, designed and constructed the building in 1925.

"It is the California Mission style of architecture, a style popular in the 1920s," said Ken Guzowski, historic preservation planner.

The complex consisted of a parish house, dining room, kitchen, educational rooms and a courtyard area in which children could play.

The actual church was where Theatre One is now.

"It was a church for around 25 years, then it outgrew its space. Then for about another 25 years, it was a funeral parlor," said Jan Rush, current owner of the property.

The funeral parlor had already been dissolved by the time Rush bought the building in 1978, and the name of the entire place became the Willcox building.

"The stairways, any church pews still around and everything that could possibly be restored has been [restored] or maintained in its original form," Rush said.

Even the funeral parlor's garage, where the hearses were parked, remains — it was converted in 1986 to Theatre Two — and the pipe organ from the church sits in an unused theater space.

Now the former church and former funeral parlor is the Bijou Theatre, which just celebrated its 15th anniversary in October.

"The Bijou has a unique following," Rush said.

The attraction of the theater may have something to do with



its diverse history — "People were married there, buried there and even baptized there," Rush said — but audiences may also come because of the Bijou's interesting and stimulating film selection.

"We try to get the alternative types of films for the main features. For late night, we're bringing back the old classics, such as Monty Python and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*," said Dana Krizan, the night manager of the Bijou.

"The types of movies they show are usually ones not shown at the 'cinemplex'; they're controversial and artsy," said Glenn, a customer

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As Bijou moviegoers watch the screen, little do they know what's behind it, an old pipe organ, present since the Bijou was a church, which night manager Dana Krizan plays before the next movie.

'This will be the last time' — Dead more than Jerry Garcia

For months, I have been trying to stir up people's emotions with informative editorials that address civic controversies and current trends in music. Did I ever once get a rush of letters saying, "Amen," "Hallelujah" or "Preach on Brother Ted?" Nooo!

I struck the nerve I was looking for when I brought up the Grateful Dead in Eugene. Most people thought that column was funny. Others did not. Some Deadheads aimed their vitriol at the letters' section of the *Emerald*, and others were a bit more direct.

Then there was the occasional campus Republican who would pat me on the back, give a smile and reassure me that Newt has a plan for them Deadheads.

C'mon people, lighten up. Jerry Garcia was cremated! I wasn't serious about bringing him back as an evil, rotting ghoul. Honest. So I've decided to write a serious column about Jerry and the

ON THE SCENE



Ted Hinds

Grateful Dead.

The Grateful Dead was part of a sociocultural phenomenon that had more to do with the people who patronized Dead shows than it did Jerry or any other member of the band.

In fact, Garcia himself acknowledged in the press that he was a very average musician. There was no virtuoso talent in the Grateful Dead. I doubt Mozart would have even been very impressed with the songwriting.

Of course that means nothing because the talent was enough for that style of music, and the songs obviously struck a chord in people. I do not, however, believe the songs were the reason for the Grateful Dead phenomenon.

The Grateful Dead was a relic of the

era it epitomized — the late 1960s. As baby boomers have grown to become the most economically powerful segment of the U.S. population, sentiments about that era as a whole have become big business.

We see it in the success of films, such as *Born On The Fourth of July*, and we hear it on classic rock radio in every city.

In the societal microcosm that developed around a Grateful Dead performance, a successful model of what our leaders tell us cannot be successful was structured for a few days.

In the parking lot, a central market formed for cold beer, condoms, candy bars and joints. Use of soft drugs became rampant without incident. Sexual promiscuity was unchaste. A temporary state of anarchy evolved.

Professionals, military personnel and young people, who were not alive in the

late '60s, were as much a part of the Grateful Dead phenomenon as the stereotypical hippy.

Off stage, the band looked more like businessmen than Deadheads. They were multimillionaires in control of a powerful monopoly, and they lived the life that came with it.

The Grateful Dead — similar to Elvis, The Beatles, Pink Floyd and the Rolling Stones — became more than a band.

The Dead became their own entity, their own psychic gestalt.

It is those Deadheads (not all) who have reduced the whole thing to a fashion statement that are really missing the point. You people do need to get a life. A sense of humor wouldn't hurt either.

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