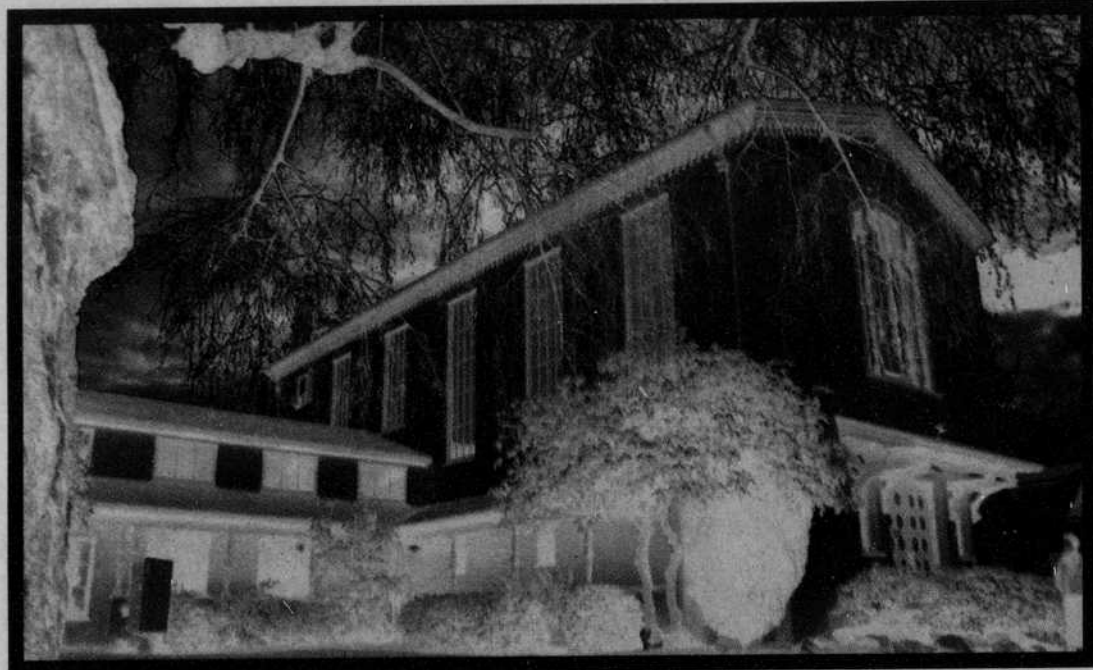


Bhosts, goblins ... and independent films

If 'spoon ghosts' and unearthly spirits sound like good movie-going company, the Bijou is the place to go



Ryan Starkweather Emerald



(above) Employees and movie-goers alike have thought the Bijou is a place of unsettled spirits. The hallway in the courtyard (left) is one place in particular that people say they have felt those ghostly presences.

By Yael Menahem
Oregon Daily Emerald

With the Oscars scheduled for March 26 — and keeping in mind that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences honors mostly mainstream Hollywood films — there's a certain comfort that the Bijou Art Cinemas in Eugene offers its patrons a taste of independent, and sometimes obscure, films year round.

Luckily, it's not housed in or anywhere near a mall, and employees aren't required to wear neon-colored bow ties and vests.

"It's a place for people with piercings and blue hair to work," says Louis Thomas, former manager at the Bijou.

But it was not always like that. The Bijou is probably the only movie theater in town with a reputation for a haunting atmosphere and as a place where customers and staff come for a night at the movies prepared to see someone from the afterlife.

"The 'spoon ghost' — how do I explain the 'spoon ghost'?" asks a perplexed-looking Dana Krizan, a Bijou projectionist.

Krizan takes a deep breath and begins to explain that every once in a while a spoon will fall from a high place onto the ground.

"I'd be standing in the booth, and the spoon would just fall," he says. "There are no shelves in there where it could've been put."

The spoon ghost was also present in the storage room and the auditorium, Krizan says. And for those who are skeptical of ghost stories, Krizan explains "that would mean that someone would have to climb 50 feet or so just to

drop a spoon."

But there is no final chapter to these incidents.

"We never really answered that mystery," Krizan says.

When Bijou owner Michael Lamont lost interest in school back in the late 1970s, a friend told him that he should look into "the jewel of a building on East 13th Avenue toward town."

Lamont did, and in 1980 the Bijou, which means "jewel" in French, opened with one auditorium in what was once the McGaffey-Andreason Mortuary.

On Oct. 15, 1980, the Bijou opened not with a movie but with a piano recital by Victor Steinberg. For its premier movie screening, Lamont played "As Time Goes By" and "Lullaby of Birdland" on the theater's pipe organ hidden behind the 15-foot screen in auditorium number one.

It was "a practice I had to abandon due to the theater's other demands on my time and energy," Lamont says with regret in his voice.

The Bijou is housed in the Willcox Building, named after W.R.B. Willcox, the first head of the University's school of architecture and the building's designer. The building was originally home to the First Congregational Church.

Ray McGaffey opened the Rose Light Chapel and the mortuary in 1956. He was intrigued by the building because of its rose-tinted lighting, created by wine-colored glass imported from London.

When he attended Sunday service, he always thought what "an ideal and beautiful place for a mortuary the building would be."

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