

Hollywood Theatre takes strides to 'Keep Portland Weird'

By John William Howard
Sports Editor

Walking down the dark alleyway next to the aging theater, I didn't quite know what I'd find. I had just walked two blocks in the rain, doing my best to stay dry while waiting to cross streets and dodging the growing puddles that collected in the ruts. After weaving past a pair of trash cans and around a badly leaking rain gutter, I found myself facing that iconic sign.

"Hollywood," it proclaimed loudly to the bustling street at its front, its lights shining on the barren sidewalk below. Still an hour before the show, the doors to the box office were locked tightly, which gave some extra time to get a closer look at what I'd come to see.

On the wall to the left of the lit up marquee was a small bronze plaque detailing how the historic theater had been built in 1926. The Hollywood Theatre opened in July of that year, boasting 1,500 seats and was hailed as a "palace of luxury, comfort and entertainment unsurpassed by any theatre on the Coast."

Now more than 90 years later, it isn't quite the place that it used to be. Once the doors finally opened and the 15 or so patrons that had been waiting under the cover filed in, it became even clearer the grandeur that at one time graced theater goers in the building's heyday.

Pictures of the building's remarkable history line the walls of the foyer leading up to the main auditorium, which was the lower deck of the venue before it was split into three theaters in 1975. An elderly Ford Model-A sits squarely in front of the entrance; carefully detailed artistry decorates the ceiling, which has now been painted over. The titles of the films for the evening are written in colored chalk on blackboards. Mine was in the largest of the three auditoriums entitled, "Have You Ever Had a Beard?"

I'll admit I really knew nothing about the film before walking in, and that I don't really know much about the film after walking out.

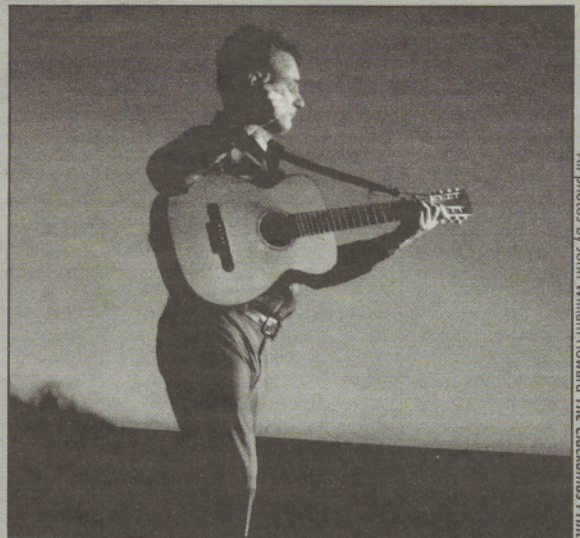
What the filmmakers had captured was the first time meeting of music writer Chris Estes and Calvin Johnson (not the wide receiver for the Detroit Lions). Johnson is a guitarist, singer, songwriter, producer and disk jockey from Seattle.

Estes and Johnson share stories and chat awkwardly, interspersed with songs from Johnson and readings from Estes' life. There wasn't really any acting to speak of (other than Johnson being, apparently, himself) and the editing was basic and choppy. The audio was poor and the video was just that. Video, not shot on film and played from a DVD player.

After the movie was finished, directors Kathy Wolf and Pat Thomas answered a smattering of questions from the audience before introducing Johnson to sing a few of the pieces he "made up himself," much to the delight of his four diehard fans that arrived to sit in the front row, one wearing bright red pants and a tweed pea coat, and another sporting hair an odd mixture of blonde and light blue.

The experience doesn't speak to the quality of the artistry; it spoke to the fact that Portland, as weird as it is, is a special place in this country. Portland is a place that allows those who have ideas, those who have obsessions, those who hold ideals, to get them out for people to see and appreciate. It seems that this city in particular is constantly looking for something new to follow. It's the hipster culture that doesn't like anything 'mainstream' and therefore goes out of its way to find its own little nook that it can call its own, but only until it becomes popular.

The people that showed up weren't there to ooh and ahh over the quality of the movie, nor were they there to see Johnson, who was entertaining, though not quite the way I expected. The movie and concert goers were there because they wanted to see something different, which is exactly what a non-profit like the Hollywood offers. With its "Hecklevision" films (heckles and comments texted to a certain number appear on screen) and its menagerie of indie productions, the beloved Hollywood Theatre helps Portland to live up to that famous slogan, "Keep Portland Weird."



All photos by John William Howard The Clackamas Print

Calvin Johnson helps "Keep Portland Weird" with his unusual performances which was seen in the movie, "Have You Ever Had a Beard?" playing at the Hollywood Theatre.



"Have You Ever Had a Beard?" played at the Hollywood Theatre last Friday.



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- Google Android v2.1+ Smartphones
- iPhone, iPod Touch, or iPad, running on iOS3.x or iOS4.x
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Rewards

- Survey will be available by email and on MyClackamas beginning Monday, Feb 27th through Monday, Mar 5th 2012.
- *Prizes will be defined in the survey.

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