

Music comes back to the OK Theatre

By Katy Nesbitt

Go! Magazine

ENTERPRISE — The music industry was one of the hardest hit by COVID-19 precautions as indoor gatherings were limited and travel restricted. During that time the OK Theatre underwent big renovations and is reopening its doors in June.

In March 2020, Wallowa County music lovers were anticipating the return of bluegrass performer Sierra Hall, but as the months dragged on theater owner Darrell Brann said it became impossible, for the short term, to rebook her.

"We rescheduled four times with Sierra, all the way into 2021, and then gave up," Brann said.

As the reality of a summer without live music loomed, Brann pivoted his attention to the ongoing remodeling of the 100+ year old building.

In the spring of 2020, the theater received its second large grant — the first helped pay to tighten up the building envelope, rebuild the stage, install a propane furnace and change out the electrical system. The renovation of the stage included the hand-carved wood artwork of Steve Arment and Anna Vogel's mural paintings as well as two

MUSIC SCHEDULE

June 30: Joseph with Meredith Lane

July 15: Zach Top

July 23: Amy Helm with Elizebeth and The Catapult

Aug. 4: Caleb Klauer and Reeb Willms with Country Band

opera boxes. The new stage was unveiled at "Joseph" band concert — a trio of women who named themselves, in part, after the county's most memorable inhabitant, Chief Joseph of the Wallowa Band Nez Perce.

PROGRESS OF THE THEATER

Brann and his wife Christi bought the theater in December 2013. He said the first show under new ownership was the Enterprise High School Christmas concert. Beginning with his own personal connections with the music world, they were able to draw up-and-coming bands from around the West as well as Grammy winning artists like bassist Victor Wooten, Bluegrass powerhouses The Infamous Stringdusters, Billy Strings, Mark O'Brien and Del McCoury, and Northwest bands



Katy Nesbitt/Go! Magazine

A man of many talents, Darrell Brann brought world-class music to the OK Theatre. A builder by trade, he comes from a family of musicians and performers often ask him to sit in for a song or two. Here he joins Kai Welch and Phoebe Hunt onstage in 2016.

like Fruition, TK and the Holy Know Nothings, the Shook Twins, as well as a host of the county's wealth of local talent.

Brann said with the help of volunteers, grants and donations the theater was the site of the theater's 100th birthday in 2019. The event was celebrated with cartoons and donuts on a Saturday morning followed by live music on an outdoor stage and a community meal in the

middle of Main Street.

By early 2020, the theater was doing better than breaking even. No one could have guessed the "Stone Foxes" show in February of that year would be the last for a long time.

"We were booking shows and the theater was starting to roll into its own," Brann said. "We were working toward raising money for a screen and all of

our other remodeling goals when we had to close down."

By early summer, the theater received its second major grant, this time for \$85,000, earmarked for the facade work.

"We completely stripped the exterior to the original concrete, but couldn't get the stucco repair work done until 2021 because of supply chain issues," Brann said.

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