

Opera House continues to thrill

The restored clock tower stands proudly at the head of Stoughton's graceful Victorian downtown, immediately visible against the sky. A well-loved historical landmark, the stone tower rises in a circular, turret style above the Stoughton Opera House and City Hall. With its arched openings topped by a four-sided clock that glows softly after dark, this could easily be the setting of a fairy tale.

The building offers a vision of glory days past. It's hard to imagine it wasn't always this beautiful.

After opening in 1901, the theater remained vibrant for almost 50 years, hosting all manner of events from vaudeville to political rallies, graduations to fashion shows, operas to silent movies with orchestral accompaniment. But creeping water damage from Wisconsin's brutal freeze-thaw cycle led to its decline in the 50s. The balcony was declared unsafe, performances slowed and eventually stopped, and, finally, the space was closed off and the clock tower removed, leaving an empty, crumbling shell of a theater to be claimed by birds and other creatures.

Debate between restoration and demolition raged until the early 80s, when "Friends of the Opera House" began gathering private dona-

tions to restore the tower and crown it with a new clock. This catapulted the restoration of the opera house, which saw fire escapes added, the balcony reinforced, the main entrance and woodwork restored, an elevator installed, heating and cooling systems added, modern dressing rooms built, the embossed metal ceiling and original chandelier upgraded, and many other details labored over. Made possible through grants, donations and many hours of both volunteer and contracted labor, the entire process took 18 years.

Restored to its former glory, the opera house reopened in 2001 and continues to grow today as an anchor for arts and culture in the community. With its excellent acoustics and active schedule of national and world-renowned performers, the historic treasure continues to fill its 475 hand-carved, wooden seats with audiences from miles around.

This past season, the stage saw a rich and varied rotation of more than 65 shows — big names such as Lyle Lovett and Herb Alpert, international stars Agnes Obel and Nick Lowe, rising talents Mipso and The Harp Twins, humorists Michael Perry and Emo Philips, and community groups such as the Stoughton

Chamber Singers. Western swing legends Asleep at the Wheel returned to raise the roof, as did bluegrass favorites Del McCoury Band and Rhonda Vincent & the Rage.



The turret tops the clock tower on the corner of the building that houses both the Opera House and the Stoughton City Hall. (Photo submitted by Peg Zaemisch)

There's always something for everyone, making the Stoughton Opera House sure to remain the "most charming theater in

southern Wisconsin" for years to come.

Visit www.stoughton-operahouse.com or call 608-877-4400 to see what exciting events are coming up. Better yet, stop in for a visit. Just follow Highway 51 right into town, and the grand and noble clock tower will be there to greet you.



Thomas' daughter, Jayne Sandine, and son-in-law, Tom Sandine, sit inside the restaurant in 1999. (Submitted photo)

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son and his brother Arthur (Judy's uncle) operated a furniture factory in northern Illinois and the pair would often invite clients up to their cabin, which meant bringing them to Halverson's, often by boat, docking on the restaurant's waterfront property.

Judy also remembers one particular kindness the restaurant owners would show to a family pet. "My uncle had a boxer who pretty much ran the neighborhood," she says. "Sometimes my customers, would go for a drink, and Mr. Halverson would let them bring the boxer into the bar," Thomas recalled.

While Judy and John, who moved to McFarland in 2000 after owning a cabin in the area since 1980, eventually stopped attending the restaurant regularly, it remained a favorite for some up to

the end.

Tracy Jane Comer of the Madison-based band Acoustic Alloy would perform at the supper club often.

"We became a regular feature there; it was great," she says. "The staff and customers were always great; they would call out songs and we would do our best to come up with them."

And although Acoustic Alloy is currently on hiatus after its second member, Theresa Peart, moved to Las Vegas, the duo teamed up again on Halverson's final night of operation, and they were thus the last group to perform there.

"It's very sad," said Comer of the closure, "I had been a customer there years ago, and they had a lot of regular customers as well. We saw a lot of the same faces each time we'd play there."

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HIGHLIGHTS 2017/18 SEASON

- DEAD HORSES – SEPT 16
- ASGEIR – SEPT 20
- MY BUBBA – SEPT 21
- PENNY AND SPARROW – SEPT 23
- MARY GAUTHIER – OCT 5
- WILLY PORTER AND CARMEN NICKERSON – OCT 7
- CHICAGO FARMER – OCT 20
- WYNONNA & THE BIG NOISE— ROOTS AND REVIVAL TOUR – OCT 21
- JEFF DANIELS AND BEN DANIELS BAND – OCT 28
- MOLLY TUTTLE BAND – NOV 3
- LEYLA MCCALLA TRIO – NOV 4
- RUTH MOODY BAND – NOV 9
- RICHARD THOMPSON – NOV 10 & 11
- MICHAEL PERRY – NOV 16
- JEFFREY FOUCAULT & KRIS DELMHORST – DEC 8
- BILLY STRINGS – DEC 9
- DAILEY AND VINCENT – MARCH 2
- RIDERS IN THE SKY – MARCH 3
- BEAU SOLEIL AVEC MICHAEL DOUCET – MARCH 9
- RHONDA VINCENT & THE RAGE – APR 6
- DEL MCCOURY BAND – APR 21
- ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL – APR 28 & 29

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