Performing Arts Center Celebrates 10 Year Anniversary This Fall

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Ten years after the public first got a glimpse of it during the memorable Hard Hat Ball, “The PAC” is a thriving center for arts and culture that draws top-level performances.

The Performing Arts Center opened on the Cal Poly campus in November 1996, and now hosts more than 300 events every year.

“The PAC,” as it’s known affectionately to locals, includes the newly renovated, 497-seat Alex and Faye Spanos Theatre (formerly the Cal Poly Theatre) and the Christopher Cohan Center, named after Cal Poly alumnus Christopher Cohan. His gift of $2.6 million, along with millions raised by Central Coast residents who support the arts, helped make the center possible.

The Performing Arts Center’s Christopher Cohan Center includes Harman Hall, a 1,282-seat concert hall; the Pavilion, a multi-purpose venue; and Philips Hall, a 170-seat recital and lecture hall.

“The fact that it’s already been 10 years is amazing in and of itself,” says PAC Director Ron Regier. He’s been at the helm at the PAC for 10 years. “Reflecting back, a lot’s happened in that time. We’ve staged nearly 1,500 public events, welcomed well more than 1 million patrons and have sold more than $20 million in tickets.”

Every year, the PAC hosts a full season of big-name entertainers often making appearances between performances in Los Angeles and San Francisco. “Tapdogs,” and “Cats” are just a few of the Broadway shows presented by national traveling companies that Central Coast residents have enjoyed at the Cohan Center. Pop stars Emmylou Harris, Judy Collins, and Kenny Loggins have appeared there; so have comedians Jay Leno, Bill Maher, and Lewis Black. Cutting-edge dance troupes including the Alvin Ailey Dance American Theatre, the Paul Taylor Dance Company and Momix, Jazz greats David Sanborn, George Winston and Wynton Marsalis, international acts including the Chieftains and Gaelic Storm, classical troupes including the Russian National Orchestra – all have appeared at The PAC in the past decade.

It is also home to large performances by many quality local arts organizations, including the San Luis Obispo Symphony, San Luis Obispo Civic Ballet, the Mozart Festival, and the Vocal Arts Ensemble.

The Mozart Festival, held each July, offers a series of concerts over several weeks, featuring professional classical musicians from across the nation. The Cal Poly campus and Cal Poly professors are frequently involved with the Mozart Festival Akademie, summer sessions on Mozart and classical music for elementary-school-aged students.

The PAC is one of the biggest assets of life on the Central Coast, said Cal Poly Arts season ticket subscriber Mitch Wolf. “We are able to see world class artists in our own town. Artists like Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris, Peter Paul & Mary, Diana Krall, George Carlin, Buena Vista Social Club, Jackson Browne, and Judy Collins.”

His wife, Marianne Wolf, added, “Not to mention Broadway touring shows like ‘Show Boat’ and ‘Stomp!’ And all that happened in just one season. You ordinarily don’t see those kinds of acts outside of much larger cities.”

Regier has been reviewing past performances too -- pulling out the files and checking records to put together a history piece on the PAC for its gala anniversary ball Aug. 26.

“We’re looking ahead to the 10th Anniversary and our goal is to recapture the magic and good vibes felt by all in 1996, and at the same time celebrate the collaborative spirit that not only made the Cohan Center a reality ten years ago, but has sustained it and nurtured the artists who have performed here since,” Regier explained.
Though it may not feel like the original Hard Hat Ball – for one thing, the PAC interior is completed – the 10th Anniversary Ball will again feature a slew of great music acts, dancing and dining. It’s set for Saturday, August 26, 7-12 p.m. Tickets are $75, and parking is free.

On Sunday, Aug. 26, the PAC will host a free Family Day, with events in the PAC plaza, followed with a performance by For the latest news on Performing Arts Center listings and events, visit the Cal Poly News Events Web page at www.calpolynews.calpoly.edu/eventsindex.html or


The Performing Arts Center Web site also offers online ticketing and a calendar of performances at its Web site, www.pacslo.org.

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