Abstract

Madison theaters are a main aspect of the city’s unique social, economic and political identity. This paper will trace the background and major changes in three theaters: the Majestic, the Orpheum, and the Overture Center. Through our study of these changes, we draw connections with major events and changes in Madison’s history and analyze the ways that the theaters reflected and at times affected these events. Each theater has had its own unique history and has specialized in an area, which is beneficial to them while not hurting the other theaters economically or socially. Though facing some limitations politically, they have been and continue to be a crucial part of Madison’s identity.

Introduction

The area around Capitol Square in Madison, WI is constantly evolving with new construction and larger buildings. However, three theaters have remained in the block around Capitol Square. Though they have evolved, some more than others, the Majestic, the Orpheum and the Overture Center have remained popular and are a crucial part of Madison society today. We want to examine the political, social, and economic forces that changed theaters in Madison since these were built, and how they have affected Madison similarly over time. Furthermore, we
want to look at how theaters reflected and shaped political, economic and social changes in Madison.

The theaters and the business around our theaters have an incredibly complicated economic relationship where the success of one directly affects the success of the other. Our research in the Archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society has included an examination of past newspapers, playbills and photos. Also, we will reference building plans and photographs. Furthermore, we have interviewed Rudy Lienau, Vice President of Operations at the Overture Center to gain his perspective on the theater climate in Madison. Lastly, we have attended events at the theaters we are researching.

Each theater began as either a Vaudeville movie theater or silent movie house in the early 1900s, and they would never have survived without being able to change the audience they appeal to. The Orpheum Theater evolved from a live performance venue to an all around venue, which has hosted everything from live shows and concerts, to movie festivals, to political events as we see today. The Majestic has become a much more local theater, often showcasing local bands and acts from around the area, appealing to a similar community through music but completely different at the same time due to the audience attracted to local acts will be far different than those going to nationally known acts coming to a theater such as the Orpheum. The Overture Center began as a silent movie theater in the early 1900s, but in order to cater to the needs of Madison it has evolved into a multi-event space. Each of these theaters has drastically changed since their inception, yet each is still successful.

First, we will walkthrough the foundation and major events at each of our three theater case studies. After reviewing relevant literature, we will be examining the economic, social, and
political Madisonian identities that the theaters have helped to form. Afterwards, we will discuss possible alternative research paths as well as provide a summary of our findings.

We want to answer how the Majestic, the Orpheum, and the Overture Center have shaped and reflected the social, economic and political changes that Madison has experienced since the earlier 1900’s. By utilizing the resources available in the Wisconsin Historical Society and through interviews and spatial analysis, we hope to trace how the theaters came to be and examine the place they hold in Madison’s unique society.

Site Setting

Following the Civil War, German immigrants came to Wisconsin and brought their entertainment traditions with them. This immigration helped to boost Madison’s existing vibrant theater culture. When the Hooley Opera House opened in 1871, Madison’s ‘theater district’ took off (Janik 2010, 60). Madison’s theater scene grew also with the rise of Vaudeville theaters, making Madison one of the premier destinations for theater by the mid-1800s (Youngerman 1947, 274). Vaudeville theaters were the main form of entertainment for many years until its decline in favor of live action plays and film movies (Evolution of Urban Society 2010, 98). This lead to the expansion of some theaters such as the Orpheum and Capitol theaters, while other classic theaters such as the Majestic shrunk at the same time. Madison is still considered a theater and music hub, exemplified by a study recently conducted by ValuePenguin that named Madison one of the top ten cities in America for music fans (Brennan 2016, n.p.).

Rapp and Rapp Architecture Firm built the Orpheum Theater in 1926 as a Vaudeville theater in 1926. Unlike many others, it has survived until today as one of the main theaters currently on State Street. Known for its great decor and sign, the design of the building and the variety of films and shows put on over the years, the Orpheum has become one of the most
important symbols of Madison's culture (Cartwright, et. al 1998, 3). While maintaining its position as a major part of Madison, the theater has had struggles, from renovations to arson; yet has endured. Over the years, movies, festivals, concerts and political rallies have taken place at the Orpheum, making it important an important venue in many different aspects of Madison’s society. During its tenure as a main theater on State Street, the ownership of the theater has changed hands many times, and each new owner has each tried to put their own mark on the theater. Ownership groups have also began to bring in management companies to attract different more diverse acts to the theater, which could prove invaluable for future success. While some aspects of the theater have been renovated, the Orpheum maintains many of the aspects, which vaulted it to the top of Madison's theater scene in the early twentieth century.

Edward F. Biederstaedt and Otto Biederstaedt first founded the Majestic Theater in 1906 (Noll 1943, n.p.). The theater started out as a Vaudeville theater, which then transitioned into other uses based on the current owner at the time. The structure of the building was created by the Madison architects Claude and Starck. The Majestic’s layout is unusual due to it originally being built in the center of a triangle-shaped block (Evjue 1969, n.p.). The theater advertised itself as Madison’s family Vaudeville theater, which attracted a huge audience and became an instant success. Only months after opening, a balcony and theater boxes were added as well as an increase in seating to 500 total capacity (New Gallery for Majestic 1907, n.p.). In 1912, Jay Sherwood and F.J. McWilliams bought the theater and transformed it into a movie house (First Vaudeville Theater Will Become Moving Picture House This Year 1912, n.p.).

During the 1960s, the Majestic became the spot to watch art house and foreign films. The Majestic holds the record for the longest showing of a film out of any Madison theater ever with the showing of My Fair Lady, which ran a total of fourteen weeks long. In 1976, the Majestic
took on a new name, Landmark Theater. The original Landmark Theater came out of Los Angeles which (ironically enough) was founded by former University of Wisconsin-Madison students. It continued to show independent as well as foreign films. The theater became a hotspot for film lovers as well as Madison’s counterculture. The popularity of cult films made the Majestic and ideal hangout during the height of the Vietnam War (Parker 1987, n.p.). In 1992, the Landmark Theater Corps. stopped its lease and was taken over by Twentieth Century Theaters which continued its showings of independent and foreign films. In 1995, it became a historical landmark. The new status did not ignite any new buzz to the theater. Seating was uncomfortable, the lobby and concession areas were small, and bathrooms were only located in the balcony (Alesia 1999, n.p.). In 1999, before its first closing, renovations such as comfortable seating, new paint, a second bathroom and new uses were proposed, yet weren’t put into effect due to low attendance. (Penkiunas 1995, 3-4). If the theater’s popularity was up at this time, the theater would have looked a lot different compared to how it looks today (Kalk 1999, 4A). On 28 March 1999, the Majestic closed (Morgan 1999, n.p.).

In 2000, Richard Fritz decided to buy the Majestic and leased it to Henry Doane who had recently bought the Orpheum (Mosiman 2002, n.p.). For a short time the Majestic became a spot for the Wisconsin Film Festival (Kalk 2002, n.p.). Due to lack of profits, a new owner decided to use the Majestic as a nightclub in 2003. This new owner, Nick Schiavo, helped to obtain the Majestic’s first ever liquor license. New renovations, which included an elevated dance floor as well as a DJ booth, were installed, and it quickly became Madison's second largest nightclub (Derby 2003, n.p.). The club hosted many hip hop shows as well as all-you-can-drink specials, the repercussions of which led to heavy restrictions on the club. Among the controversial restrictions were limits on operating hours and a ban on hip hop shows. The new restrictions led
to a decrease in popularity and the eventual shutdown of the club (Elbow 2005, n.p.). In 2007, Gerding and Leslie bought the Majestic and revamped its purpose towards live music. Though live music is the primary focus, other events and shows are put on at the Majestic, including vaudeville shows, burlesque shows, political rallies/events, live concerts, weddings and many other events (Albertoni 2007, n.p.).

The Capitol Theater opened in 1928, the latest of the theaters we are focusing on. The Capitol Theater was designed as a silent movie house, which included a large Grand Barton organ to add a soundtrack to silent movies. Architects Rapp & Rapp created a unique experience in Madison, one that was meant to add not only culturally to Madison, but also to bolster economic growth (Madison Civic Center 1975, 9). Following the rise of ‘talkies,’ the Capitol Theater switched to live music events in order to stay in business. The Capitol Theater was one of the crucial theaters, which helped Madison residents stay entertained during years of the Great Depression (Janik 2010, 118).

The city began planning to redo the theater 1974 as the theater was in deteriorating condition and was in need of revamping to match contemporary society. The theater was carefully reimagined in order to cater to a variety of venues, such as adjusting sizes of the theater in order to better speech acoustics (Madison Civic Center 1975, 42-43). The designs meant to blend the theater in with other parts of State Street, a stark comparison to the later updated version of the Overture Center (Madison Civic Center 1975, 112). The original plan called for updating “adjoining commercial structures” as well as a theater to bolster the entire section of State Street (Madison Civic Center 1975, 13). In 1980, the newly created Civic Center was born.

The Overture Center opened in 2004 due to the private donations of Jerry Frautschi. Following selling his company to Mattel for a large sum, he donated $250 million and helped to
fundraise for the new Overture Center, which was able to open without taxpayer money. This was one of the largest donations to an arts program anywhere in the world (Janik 2010, 166). Designed by architect Cesar Pelli, the Overture Center changed the feel of State Street, bringing a modern vibe to the iconic main street. Despite some initial hesitation to the new design, the Overture Center today is a staple of culture and life in Madison (Henry 2004, 21).

Literature Review

Culturally, theaters have provided a haven for different groups of people throughout the years and given them a safe space to congregate and perform. Through the allowing of fringe groups to congregate in their theaters these groups have helped financially support the theaters and really give them an identity within the city.

The National Register of Historic Places form for the Majestic and the Overture provides insight and background for the original construction and development of our theaters. For example, at the time of nomination, the Orpheum was know as “the most intact example in Madison of the early twentieth century Vaudeville theater”, which represented a good portion of early Madison culture. The nomination form also discusses the theaters early association with the RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Orpheum chain and later associations of which it was a member (Cartwright, et. al 1998, 6).

When the current owners of the Majestic bought the building in 2007 and centralized the theater’s use to live music, it helped to increase the overall popularity and success for the theater as well as all King Street businesses. New renovations as well as effective promoting helped the Majestic’s image change to a positive one. After popularity grew, all King Street businesses profits increased. The addition of large events such as live concerts on King Street brought people to the street to listen to great music as well as explore the neighboring businesses. The
owners went on to help organize shows and concerts in other cities of Wisconsin as well as other states, leaving the Majestic’s name behind as a reminder to audiences to come visit the Majestic theater (Burke 2013, 12). The Majestic struggled with keeping up with the Orpheum and the Overture Center as well as modern cinemas due to technological changes. The addition of live music to the theater space made technology almost irrelevant and the history of the building as well as popular music acts were essential to creating buzz for the theater. Looking further into what has made the Majestic successful, considering it fell behind the advancements of the other two theaters, will allow for an explanation to what a business can have in order to still be a success in Madison.

In Madison, Vaudeville theater was a huge success, attracting families and acts from across the country and world to come to the city and take in the different forms of entertainment. As Youngerman states “rarely, since the appearance in 1838 of Madison’s first newspaper, the Wisconsin Enquirer, has any Madison daily or weekly paper failed to carry an item of theatrical interest” (Youngerman 1947, 273). This quote seems innocuous at first glance, but it showcases the importance that theater played in the foundation of Madison and the major role it played in the culture of the city. Theaters were one of, if not the most important, aspect of the city that truly attracted people to come and see all Madison had to offer. There were originally 12 theaters built in the late 1800s-1920s, of which only the Majestic, Orpheum and Capitol theaters have been able to survive until the present where all three are still popular today among different audiences and still provide great entertainment to people who live in Madison and those who may visit. The survival of these three theaters is related to their ability to adapt and assimilate to new technology as well as what avenue of entertainment would help bring in the most money for the lowest cost (Allen 1979, 5-11). During this time theaters were quite expensive brought in a
lot of money for the city and the theaters, mainly through live plays at this time. Overall, Youngerman is attempting to show the great impact that theaters have had on Madison pre-1900. This quote does it perfectly, since the city has had the ability to circulate news, residents cannot go a week, let alone a day without hearing about a theater or what is going on in the theaters showing them as an integral part of the society and very important to the residents and the city itself.

We referenced Scott Tate’s study of Roanoke, VA and their evolving image as a cultural attraction. Similar to Madison, Roanoke’s leaders have attempted to make entertainment and arts a large part of the city’s profits and image. The city relies in many ways on the arts for their image, such as a large number of public art pieces spread around the city. Though the initial plan did not bring immediate analyzable help to the city, the continuing investment in entertainment venues like theaters in Roanoke have helped with urban revitalization. Furthermore, Tate notes that many of the arts venues in Roanoke, such as the Taubman Museum, bring an architectural appeal to the city and is a “key economic anchor” for financial help from donors to the arts program in the city (Tate 2015, 129). By looking at this case study, we can draw connections between business revitalization and the theater industry as well as Madison’s identity.

Similarly, John Bender examines the use of entertainment districts in downtown development, especially in their ability to compete with shopping malls. As more people in the suburbs turned to shopping malls for retail options, cities attempted to transform the downtown districts into cultural attractions, and one of the easiest ways to do this was through downtown development. Bender also points out again how the architecture of downtown entertainment venues attracts more people than a mall purely for the feel of the area. Malls traditionally sprawl and have large boxy stores, while entertainment venues often are either historically reminiscent
or designed in an unique way. Furthermore, Bender argues that while a good entertainment venue can be economically rewarding, it is necessary to create an experience downtown by mixing the available entertainment options. For example, it is more rewarding to go to a musical venue after also touring a market and getting dinner at a restaurant. The connections in Bender’s thesis give us a springboard for our conversation about Madison’s business and cultural identity (Bender 2003, n.p.).

Economics

One of the most important parts of our theaters and the economic scene in Madison is the pull that the theaters, like all entertainment destinations, has on the success of businesses which use the pull of the theaters to get people into downtown for their business. National trends lead to more and more people moving out of downtown spaces to relocate to the suburbs. With the construction of West Towne Mall in 1970 and East Towne Mall in 1971, the amount of customers going downtown became limited. The pull of the theaters as one of the main entertainment attractions in the downtown area helped keep people visiting downtown (Evolution of Urban Society 2010, 150).

The diversification of entertainment hubs brings consumers looking for new attractions (Developing Retail Destinations 2001, 10). Some may come one night for a concert at the Majestic but return the next week for an off-Broadway presentation at the Overture. Entertainment venues such as theaters tend to broadcast about 35 miles out, which in the case of our theaters, encompasses a population over 550,000 people (Developing Retail Destinations 2001, 62). This keeps people coming into the downtown from a greater distance, which helps the downtown Madison businesses generate a larger revenue.
The advertisements of the theaters also are a big part of helping Madison’s economic identity. As seen in this playbill (figure 2.1) from the play “The Pajama Game” at the Orpheum in April 19th -21st, 1956, local businesses were already starting to advertise in playbills to visit before or after the show, such as the Hoffman House did in this playbill. Local businesses capitalized on the theater visitors to help their local businesses grow.

Additionally, signage is one of the most important aspects of many theaters as it greatly helps the advertising and bringing in consumers. Throughout their research they tried to prove that for small businesses, signage is the most important form of marketing and can have drastic impacts on the choices of consumers. Signage is something that is often an afterthought and something people would rather ignore, as the NYSSBDC shows through their study. They found signs are the most effective way to increase customer traffic and bring in more money to the business; in one study they found:

“the installation of a new V-shaped, internally illuminated sign increased gross annual revenues by 16 percent during the first year. In the second year, revenues increased another 32 percent. [Company] later expanded into the shop next door and added an even larger sign. In four years, as a result of the restaurant expansion and signage improvement, gross income increased 322% to over $823,000” (NYSSBDC 2004, 12).

While this is an example for a restaurant, it is quite clear that the signage and simply getting a business name more publicity is a great way to attract customers. The Orpheum sign is one of the best examples of this in our study. The Orpheum sign is one of the main parts of State Street and was redone in mid-2016 to be an exact replica of the original sign. As seen in the figure 1.1, the newly renovated sign towers over State Street, allowing for everyone to see it and potentially
become a paying customer. Therefore, theaters in Madison help to explain the economic landscape of local businesses and restaurants that cater to theater-goers. The Orpheum sign exemplifies how the theaters advertise to their consumers (NYSSBDC 2004, n.p.). Additionally, the ability of local business to advertise in the playbills directly indicates the way that they utilize the draw of the theaters to gain new consumers.

**Social**

The connection between theaters and Madison’s social scene are similar to the way that any entertainment venue affects the social scene of a city. However, in Madison in particular, it is the overlapping and emergence of specialization of each theater in their events that distinguishes the impact on the social scene. Socially, the theaters in Madison together create diverse cultural experiences for those visiting as well as affect the overall atmosphere of downtown Madison.

As Rudy Lienau, Vice President of Operations at the Overture noted, the grouping of so many theaters has led to a “synergy” in the events that Madison can offer. The Overture Center, with seven spaces for events, features a multitude of events including Broadway, symphony orchestras, local a cappella groups, weddings and political rallies. As Rudy noted, they were even ranked #26 in the world for events by Pollstar. The Orpheum has smaller headlines as well as political rallies. They are open to a slightly wider range of venues, including comedians and a variety of genres of music. The Majestic hosts smaller and local bands, as well as unique events such as their 80s vs 90s vs 00s dance parties or holiday Brew n’ Views, which include a movie and drinks.

In conjunction with the Barrymore and the Memorial Union theater, consumers in Madison have the ability to choose from a variety of events. This makes Madison an
entertainment destination. The large number of people traveling into the downtown can change the social scene of Madison. The synergy allows for a mixing of social interests in Madison, creating socially diverse groups of people in the downtown. For example, the fact that the Overture may be showing the Phantom of the Opera on the same night that Skillet is at the Orpheum means that those two groups of people will be going to local businesses before and after the show. Due to the proximity of our theaters to each other, this leads to a concentrated group of different interests, helping diversify Madison’s social scene.

Additionally, the theaters all host events at different times of the day. The Overture Center has children’s shows as well as matinees, which make it a destination in the afternoon and midday as well as in the evening. Similarly, most of the shows begin at the latest at 8 or 9 PM. Conversely, the Orpheum is almost exclusively a late-night theater, which a lot of shows going until midnight or later. Lastly, the Majestic similarly starts late and ends late. One of our researchers attended an 80s vs 90s vs 00s dance party event that the Majestic hosted. She left at 12:30 AM, early compared to most who attended the event. The theaters therefore guarantee that there will be something to do at all times of the day for a variety of age groups, which gives Madison an exciting social atmosphere.

One unique aspect of our theaters is that the Orpheum historically has belonged to the RKO Circuit. Following the introduction of the Orpheum Circuit and the combination with Keith Abee, the RKO Circuit was formed and took over the theater industry throughout the nation. According to Wertheim:

“During the 1890s, the Orpheum playbills were among the most eclectic in the nation. It was not unusual to see a Parisian ballet on the same program as a blackface comedy skit or a Hungarian boys military band followed by an
aerial artist. As the economy improved, the Orpheum became the place for San Francisco theatergoers to go for a night on the town. The theater was regularly sold out including the standing room. Its admission ranged from ten cents for balcony seats to twenty-five cents for reserved seats, and fifty cents for opera chairs and box seats. Meyerfeld next opened the first Los Angeles Orpheum in 1894” (Cartwright, et. al 1998, 54).

This quote is important in understanding the early expansion of the Orpheum Circuit and gets into the monopoly that they held over the entertainment industry. Through the amount of theaters controlled by the holding company, the Orpheum Circuit was able to control what acts were seen and when they were performing, after the merger with Ablee, essentially gaining a monopoly on the American Live Entertainment Industry. Through the great control of the industry, these theaters were able to expand as they pleased and often tried to attract as many customers as they possibly could. This let them also pick the specific shows to appeal to the social climate at the time and gain fans and customers through advertising and appealing to them, which is essentially the same way that theaters attract customers today.

Throughout the 1930s-1970s, the Orpheum was a symbol of what Madison used to be, an eclectic movie house with acts and films from all over the world. However, as time passed and technology advanced, new issues arose from what types of shows could be held at these venues in the future as live shows became far less popular and film movies took center stage in the entertainment industry. The Orpheum is a theater that truly caters to anything a consumer could want in this day in age. As Joe Tarr, writer for the Isthmus Paper explores:

“In 2012 Gus Paras purchased the Madison Orpheum with the intention of restoring it to its original beauty and bringing entertainment fanatics back to
Madison. Paras' vision for the historic theater is to offer a little bit for everybody. He says one good thing that former owner Eric Fleming did was to combine the Orpheum's two theaters, making the smaller back theater part of the main theater's stage. ‘That's why everybody wants the Orpheum today, because the stage is big enough that you can put any show you want on there,’ he says. ‘Now everybody wants it.’” (Tarr 2013, 3).

The large stage, along with the sign, is now one of the most recognizable features of the theater, which now has room for over 2000 people to watch shows there. This is what really continues to attract a new crowd and different events each year. From concerts, to political events, to movie screenings, the Orpheum is able to showcase different types of media to different groups all using the same area and without having to change the venue around in anyway. Another aspect that Paras added to the Orpheum was a restaurant to compete with others theaters in the area, which already had this feature to appeal to consumers and bring in more customers.

The most impressive change recently to the Orpheum has been the renovation of the sign to match the original. According to Gus Paras, owner of the Orpheum, he wanted to bring back a sense of what State Street used to be like and bring back the culture felt in the area then. This was historically very important, as it has helped bring the city back to being an entertainment hub for people to come from miles around. The fact that the sign is exactly the same (apart from the age and a couple materials) as the original is important for keeping the integrity of the theater. This has been seen in other theaters in Madison as well, such as the Yost Facade of the Overture Center, which has remained unchanged throughout the theater's history. The signage of The Orpheum has been a critical part of the theater since it was founded, attracting customers
and lighting up State Street for people walking up or down and taking in the sights. Yet over the years, there have been feuds and other actions harming the theater and its ability to operate.

The Orpheum has constantly changed what type of theater it is, showing everything from films to live plays to concerts and political rallies. According to Jay Rath of the Isthmus Paper, in 2012, “the Orpheum appeared to have finally found a successful business model last December. After trying movies and adding a restaurant, then closing the restaurant, halting movies and restoring the backstage space, it was poised to be a profitable concert venue and rental space with catering services” (Rath 2012, n.p.). The most recent change to the Orpheum of more space and the restaurant was an attempt to bring greatness that had been lost as live action and higher technology industries replaced Vaudeville theaters.

Image analysis and searching archival images to compare to today's theaters was an interesting aspect to look at especially since there are expected changes over time as technology and theaters develop, yet many of them never occurred and when they did, the theaters maintained their social and historical integrity in areas that could never be replaced. The original photograph of State Street (figure 2.2) when compared to the versions taken today (figure 1.1) can show the drastic changes in the street itself, while for the most part the theaters have remained intact and pieces of Madison history. Gentrification of State Street has never really taken place as can be seen in these photos, much of the buildings exteriors and aspects remain similar, the photos do show one distinct difference due to social changes however. State Street has become a pedestrian mall, allowing very limited vehicle access and making it an area for students and locals to visit on foot. Although this change has occurred, much of the State Street area has remained similar to its original form in an attempt to stay true to the social atmosphere it
provides. The facade of the Capitol Theater and the Orpheum has stayed almost identical to their original forms, with minimal changes to the facades themselves.

The sign of The Orpheum is nearly an exact replica of the original out in by Rapp & Rapp in the late 1920s, while the now Overture center has removed the capitol theater sign as it has changed name and ownership throughout the years, it however has kept the historical and social significance such as the Yost Facade and original organ, one of the most important parts of the original capitol theater. Other changes can be seen more through a historical lens such as the removal of the trolley line running down State Street to clear it for pedestrian traffic and due to the limiting of all traffic on the street. The gentrification of the State Street and Capitol Square area was a local fear during the renovations to the Overture Center and the acts and clientele it would attract, yet more of the changes on State Street have been made for student benefit and that in itself has been able to benefit the theaters immensely, by putting one of their main consumer groups in the immediate vicinity.

The Capitol Theater opened as a contemporary theater. The theater remained the same until it was torn down in the 1970’s to build the new Civic Center. The traditional theater helped Madison’s State Street remain a traditional downtown longer than other cities. In a newspaper article by Michael Bauman in the Wisconsin State Journal on July 21st, 1974, right as the Capitol Theater deal was being finalized, Michael Duffey, a state employee, had the vision that the new Civic Center would create the impression that “downtown Madison is alive.” The overall goal of the project was to create “sociability” in Madison, Duffey explains, through the construction of the new Civic Center.

While there have been changes throughout time, these theaters have largely remained constant reminders of Madison’s great theatrical past and shows that they can succeed in nearly
any economic climate. Another important fact is that each theater also serves a different purpose to the city, with The Majestic being a more indie music and hipster venue, The Orpheum showcasing multiple types of acts, from films, to music concerts, to comedy shows and the Overture Center catering to a more high end crowd and giving the city a play to put in performances in one of the many theaters throughout the center. Each of these theaters has been able to survive and succeed due to the fact that they cater to different audiences during different times of the day and therefore the theaters do not really compete, but benefit each other, if an event wants to go to The Majestic but there is not room, they can go to The Orpheum and vice versa if it is a smaller show, or potentially a more high end show may go to The Overture.

Architecture

As noted by the Landmark Nomination forms from the Orpheum and Majestic, the Orpheum was built with an art deco architectural style and the Majestic was built with a second renaissance revival architectural style. The second renaissance revival style was widely popular from about 1910 to about 1930. A lot of the architectural features were inspired by 14th and 15th century architecture in Italy. The urban palazzo as constructed for the Medici family was the main influence for architecture that was constructed in the twentieth century. Designers studied intently on the features of Greek and Roman building structures, which helped to create the second renaissance revival style. They thought it displayed wealth, artist knowledge and pride. It took awhile for it to become popular. It was not officially popular until the late 1920s. Buildings typically built in this style were libraries, social lodges, courthouses and banks. Most buildings developed in the second renaissance revival style have a rectangular floor plan and contain a symmetrical facade. Other common elements include stone exterior walls and cast stone or terra
cotta detailing. Features such as quoined corners of the facade or a rustic-looking ground level helps to distinguish second renaissance revival from other architectural styles. Elaborate string courses create a division between floors is seen in figure 2.3. Rounded windows are another characteristic of second renaissance revival as seen from the arched top of the window, pictured (figure 1.2 & 1.3). Many buildings structured in this style have flat roofs that are hidden by cornices, which is an ornamental molding around the wall of a room right below the ceiling. This can be seen on both generation photographs of the Majestic (Italian Renaissance Revival 2016, n.p.).

One of the ways that one can identify the art deco architectural style is by the sharp-edged look and the geometric decorative elements. The style became vastly popular around the mid to late 1920s when Finnish architect, Eliel Saarinen submitted a design that was widely publicized and helped to gain attention as a new architectural style. The idea behind the art deco style was take the old and create something new and it was one of the first American architectural styles to do this. What makes art deco such a unique style of architecture is the sleek appearance along with the geometric design that flows throughout the structure. The main facade usually contains setbacks or indented levels of the building that give it a stepped look. Decorative panels can usually be seen on entrances of buildings, as well as windows. What gives art deco its smooth look is the materials used to build it. Materials typically used are stucco, concrete block, glazed brick and mosaic tile. Chevrons and zigzag patterns are widely used for geometric accents and add a sort of textured pattern to buildings (Art Deco Style 1925 - 1940 2016, n.p.). As noted by the Landmark Nomination Form for the Orpheum, the Orpheum has a facade that rises two-stories and is made of smooth limestone. Other parts of the theater were made of red brick. The narrow windows have low-relief ornamentation, which is one way that
one can identify the theater’s art deco style. The interior however, is mostly constructed in the style of French Renaissance. The interior is very decorative with many ornamented elements. Many of these architectural styles mentioned became popular around the same time period and share similar characteristics. Many decorative elements can be made out by all three of the architectural styles mentioned and help to give theaters, especially the Orpheum and Majestic, an attractive appearance that continues to attract show-goers (Cartwright, et. al 1998, 3).

People generally like to spend time at areas that have a nice atmosphere and a unique appearance. These old but renewed architectural styles have become a staple of theaters as can be seen by mock-facades such as the one at Marcus Point Cinemas. The copied style and facade is what makes new modern theaters have a somewhat similar appearance to older theaters and is instantly recognized as a theater. Theaters have become more and more of a social space with interior renovations such as adding bars, restaurants, improved seating. These additions will help to grow theaters as a complex space for entertainment and socializing. The Overture Center’s renovations of adding theaters for different kinds of shows for different age groups helps to attract a diverse audience and make it a great place for socializing with friends and family.

The problem of rebranding State Street emerged again with the construction of the Overture Center. Designed by internationally acclaimed architect Cesar Pelli, the Overture Center was a deviation from anything else State Street had ever seen. Though Pelli designed the building “to feel like Madison,” the large glass building sparked some pushback from the community (Henry 2004, 19). Vice President of Operations for the Overture Center Rudy Lienau recalls the accusations of “the gentrification of State Street” starting with the Overture Center. Partially as an attempt to mold the Overture with the 100 block, the design included the historic Yost façade (figure 1.4). However, as you can see from the photos of Overture Hall (figure 1.5
and 1.6), the theater still gives a high-end feel simply due to the design of the outside and the inside. The social climate of Madison and the identity that its residents wanted to portray was at risk with the change of the outside of the theaters.

The landmark nomination form of the Majestic and Orpheum Theaters provides insight and background for the original construction and development of our theaters. For example, at the time of nomination, the Orpheum was know as “the most intact example in Madison of the early twentieth century Vaudeville theater”, which represented a good portion of early Madison culture and social identity, while continuing that legacy into today. The nomination form also discusses the theaters early association with the RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Orpheum chain and later associations of which it was a member, which will be discussed in more detail later on (Cartwright, et. al 1998, 6).

The landmark nomination form for the Majestic gives lots of details about zone district, architectural style, building materials, as well as significant details about renovations and a sense of the theater’s layout (Penkiunas 1995, 3). In 1999, before its eventual first closing, ideas for the theater’s new use as well as renovations were in the works but the ideas weren’t put into effect due to low attendance. Comfortable seating, which the Majestic lacked for a long time, would be updated, as well as new paint, installation of a second bathroom, refinished doors, etc. If the theater’s popularity was up at this time, the theater would have looked a lot different compared to how it looks today (Kalk 1999, 4A). These comparisons are helpful to view State Street as a shifting entity, which the businesses are always trying to fit into and succeed within.

Political

One of the best examples of the intersection of our theaters and Madison’s identity is the political battle that ensued over the acquisition of the Capitol Theater in the 1970’s. As reported
in the Cap Times on January 3rd, 1975 by Phil Haslanger, the city of Madison had just lost a bitter struggle to build an auditorium along Lake Monona where the current Monona Terrace is located. Mayor Paul Soglin desperately wanted to build an auditorium in Madison, in part to fulfill his campaign promises. However, the city recognized the need for large conference gatherings and the potential business revenue there. So, in 1974, the city bought the Capitol Theater to create the Civic Center.

From our perspective, the renovation of a theater seems a natural answer to the needs of the community. But the community was not in support of such a change. The Cap Times, especially reporter Michael Bauman, closely reported the “Long Saga of the Capitol Theater,” at times projecting the city government and Mayor Soglin as the enemy. In fact, Mayor Soglin (jokingly) picketed the Cap Times in response to their “unfair” reporting of the entire affair (Soglin Pickets Times 1974, 2). The purchase of the theater even provoked political cartoons (figure 2.4).

Similarly, the transformation of the Civic Center to the Overture Center also provoked community rebuttal and affected the politics in Madison. Jerry Frautschi and his wife Pleasant Rowland donated all the funds for the construction of the Overture Center, a grand total of $205 million. Rudy Lienau, Vice President of Operations, sat down with us to walk us through the process. He recalls the donation was a “double-edged sword.” On one hand, the entire project was paid for. However, since there were no donations from the community, the community felt as though it was on the outside of the process and had no say in the matter. Additionally, when the market crashed in 2008, there was no network in place for fundraising to help make up the difference.
In 1948, the Supreme Court made a decision in the *United States v. Paramount Pictures, et al.* case, which was the longest running case against Paramount Pictures. The case was against more than just Paramount Pictures and included other Hollywood studio monopolies such as Universal, MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Bros., Columbia and RKO. The case accused these production companies for violating the Sherman Antitrust Act and controlling film distribution and exhibition. The production companies were accused of “block booking” where independent theater owners signed contracts with these studios which required the owners to show a “block” of films from these production companies. The government demanded these companies to end “block booking” and stop distribution to theaters or get rid of the theaters. The case originally began in 1940 but was called off after only two weeks. This occurred because the government, along with a couple of studio attorneys, was able to come to a decision to limit “block booking.” On May 3rd, 1948, the studios were declared guilty for violating the antitrust law and the studios were forced to sign consent decrees that would force the end of “block booking.” Films can only be sold individually and the production companies are forced to deprive themselves of power and control of their theater chains. Independent producers were now able to compete against the larger production companies (*U.S. Supreme Court decides Paramount antitrust case* 2016, n.p.).

Politically, there have often been zoning and other political restrictions on these theaters, causing them to change their renovation plans, forcing changes through taxes, denying licenses or more blatant ways of attempting to outright refuse them the ability to put on certain types of shows. Many assume, especially in the case of the Orpheum, that the reason for this purposeful blocking is due to unwanted noise in these areas from people how do not realize the effect that closing the theaters could have on their own businesses. These assumptions take into account the
negative view some business owners take toward different theaters just because of what is happening there, neglecting the benefit these theaters have on their businesses. As recently as 2012, when Gus Paras purchased the Orpheum, many local business owner wanted to prevent him to have musical acts come to town. Paras responded to the committee by showing them that the very people who were complaining were also the people who had previously been attempting to buy the theater to do exactly what he was doing. This won the case, allowing the Orpheum to continue to bring musical acts in.

When looking at the Majestic, such regulations such as zoning codes and noise complaints were a major drawback when trying attract an audience. Future businesses or buildings in general have to follow regulations in order to even be built on the same street as the Majestic (King Street). Ideas for building a hotel on King Street were in major consideration, which would hopefully help build a larger audience for the Majestic as well as neighboring businesses. Height regulations are the main zoning code that has either stopped or postponed the idea of a hotel on King Street. The regulation would have to be amended in order for a building to surpass the height of the other King Street businesses (Davidoff 2015, 6). We will be looking more into how these regulations, licenses, etc. have played a role in advancing the state of State Street and King Street’s overall identity.

Between the years of 2003 and 2006, obtaining the Majestic’s first ever liquor license as well as the new use becoming a nightclub led to noise complaints as well as disruptions to the public. During this time period, negative public responses led to the city of Madison putting heavy restrictions on the nightclub such as, increasing the number of bouncers and having the nightclub close an hour before closing time. These regulations hurt the nightclub and decreased the Majestic’s overall perception to the public (Kalk 2007, A1). Noise at the Majestic led to a
decrease in popularity. Luckily, changing the use of the Majestic in 2007 to a live music venue led popularity to take a massive leap in the positive direction.

Politically, our theaters have created major waves as they have changed over the years. Though they have faced some government regulations and have created some backlash from the community, they remain a major part of the complex political scene in Madison. Our theaters in many ways have been a platform for political action in the community, which have integrated them into the overall political landscape.

Further Research

We chose our three cases studies of the Orpheum, the Majestic and the Overture Center because in our opinion they are the most prominent theaters in Madison’s downtown. Going forward, we would like to include research about the Memorial Union theater and the Barrymore theater, which are also both important theaters in the community. We would also like to expand our research to venues such as the Kohl Center and the Alliant Energy Center, which both host shows that could have gone to our theaters. For example, this year Carrie Underwood performed at the Kohl Center due to the large amount of space available for tickets. It would be useful to include events such as these to highlight some limitations that our theaters have in their ability to serve the Madison community.

Additionally, in order to concretely show the importance we have discovered that theaters have had on Madison’s identity, it would be useful to conduct a similar study in another city of a comparable population size and analyze any theaters in their downtown to examine the extent of the uniqueness of Madison’s theaters. We believe that Madison’s theaters are unique for the variety of entertainment they offer and their central importance in the town, but it would be strengthened with a comparative analysis. However, we believe that finding a truly comparable
city may be difficult, given the size of Madison yet also its importance as the capitol as well as major city in Wisconsin.

Conclusion

Since the founding of the state of Wisconsin, theater has always had a major influence in Madison’s social, political and economic sectors. Since the 1860s, German immigrants to Wisconsin brought entertainment traditions with them, leading to a great atmosphere for theaters clearly shown by the great number throughout time. This in part started Madison’s vibrant theater culture but there were many other factors involved as well. When the Hooley Opera House, one of the first major theaters in Madison, opened in 1871, Madison’s ‘theater district’ took off (Janik 2010, 60). Vaudeville theaters eventually fell out of favor as the main types of media changed from live action plays to film movies, leading to the expansion of some theaters such as the Orpheum and Capitol theaters, while other classic theaters such as the Majestic shrunk at the same time to accommodate the changes. Madison is still considered a theater and music hub, exemplified by a study recently conducted by ValuePenguin that named Madison one of the top ten cities in America for music fans. Each of the theaters in Madison has its own unique space which it fills, this leads to the economic success of each theater as well as having many social benefits for residents.

While some aspects of the theaters have been renovated, many of the surviving theaters still contain great historical pieces within them. The Orpheum maintains many of the aspects which vaulted it to the top of Madison's theater scene in the twentieth century, from the stage to the replica of the sign, much too he theater still is or appears to be in its original form, keeping the historical theater feel of Madison’s state street while towering over it to attract customers to their shows just as it did in the 1930s (figure 2.3).
The theaters in Madison have also faced many issues. The Orpheum suffered arson in 2004 and was heavily damaged, however it recovered through extensive renovations while maintaining historical integrity and eventually gaining a place on the National Register of Historic Places, and is able to thrive today. The Majestic as well has faced its own share of problems in ownership and zoning regulations even causing it to close for a period of time. After closing and reopening, the Majestic quickly became one of Madison's largest nightclub and a premier nightlife destination in the city. Due to popularity and subsequent noise complaints, the city put heavy restrictions on operating hours of the club. The new restrictions led to a decrease in popularity and let to the shutdown of the club once again. However, thanks to new ownership, it has once again reopened as a great destination for live music and shows of a much more niche variety than the Orpheum or Overture center allowing for it to succeed. Live music is now the primary focus but other events and shows are put on at the Majestic which includes vaudeville shows, burlesque shows, political rallies/events, live concerts, weddings and many other events (Albertoni 2007, n.p.). The opening of the Overture Center in 2004 has given State Street much more vibrant and high-end arts scene. The donation by Frautschi was one of the largest donations to an arts program anywhere in the world (Janik 2010, 166). Designed by architect Cesar Pelli, the Overture Center changed the feel of State Street, bringing a modern vibe to the iconic main street of Madison. Despite some initial hesitation to the new design, the Overture Center today is a staple of culture and life in Madison, as Rudy Lienau referenced in his interview, the donation has helped the center immensely as well as brought in surrounding businesses and people to the downtown area.

Each of these theaters have had their own effects on the State Street area but when brought together they make for a vibrant entertainment hub attracting people from hundreds of
miles around. This, along with many other factors in Madison, give State Street and the Capitol Square area an incredibly beneficial economic, and social climate for theaters to operate in, and while they face some political restrictions, the hindrance is minimal and they are still succeeding today. Each theater has been able to succeed while in a sense benefitting each other by filling a role that the other theaters do not excel at showing a non-competitive nature, which brings the present economic and social climate, we are able to see today. Undoubtedly, the Madison of today would not be the same if not for the impact of the downtown theaters.
APPENDIX 1

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2
Figure 1.5

Figure 1.6
APPENDIX 2

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2
Figure 2.3

Figure 2.4
APPENDIX 3

We also were able to interview Rudy Lienau, who is the Vice President of Operations at the Overture Center. He has been involved in the Overture Center since the late 1980’s when it was the Madison Civic Center. As follows is the transcript from the interview. Maren asked the questions, while Joe and Alex took notes of the conversation. Alex’s notes are noted in blue, while Joe’s are noted in red.

Interview with Rudy Lienau - Friday, November 4th at 2PM

1) Tell us about the initial investment in the Overture by Jerry Frautschi and Pleasant Roland. How did the fact that no taxpayer money was used affect community support of the theater?

Rudy was an events manager since 1983 with the Civic Center. Jerry Frautschi, after selling his company to Mattel and making a bit of money, ended up giving back to the community. He asked 40-60 local community arts organizations what they needed changed. The revealed they couldn’t perform what they wanted to in the space so they created a new space with higher quality venues in the same location. This single family gave all the money for the Overture Center, which inspired people calling it the ‘gentrification of State Street.’ Look into newspapers from 2002-2005 for information. They gave 105 million up front, and 100 million in investments. There was no infrastructure for funding, and the arbitrage on the investments was supposed to fill in the gap between the profits and expenses, until the market crashed. At this point more donations came in.
Family gives to community based ideas. This is a double-edged sword, because it is good for community, but there is the impression that it is just what the donor wants. This gave space for the needs of many theaters. Overture made new events possible as well. However, there was the issue of arbitrage. The 2008 market crash led to a lot of hard times for the bank that owned the parts. Overture Center put density in a place using area services. Destroyed infrastructure at start of Overture but great recovery to 3 million a year.

2) Have you run into any issues with zoning regulations around Capitol Square?

Zoning is not an issue, as there is a public private entity-cultural Madison Arts District. The city of Madison wanted it to go through, and that there was limited pushback on zoning.

Zoning not an issue, all converted properties were under one governing body – city of Madison wanted it.

   a. Do you think State Street has a favorable climate for theaters and business?

State Street has a very favorable climate for business. Parking part of infrastructure are more successful than ones that didn’t. Remember so much of Madison does not pay taxes – capitol, university.

Yes!

   b. Why do you think so?

’96-’98 compared to ’04-’06, there was a restaurant boom of high scale restaurants. Foot traffic leads to easy connectivity. High density living places help bring people in.

   c. What makes State Street so favorable?

3) Did the restaurant bring in new clientele? How did the restaurant change the overall theater experience?

   High end restaurant growth
4) How has the centralization of multiple event spaces within the Overture Center made it a primary contributor (economically, politically, culturally, etc.) on State Street?

Ability to have dance performances in any hall. Overture hall holds orchestral and multipurpose events, capitol theater holds multipurpose things as well, the playhouse is busy in the summer. All venues are seducing different communities. Playhouse – foreward/children’s theater. Promenade hall – Black box with a stage – live dance, small. Can use dance events in any of the theaters due to the flooring. Architects listened to Overture input

5) In your opinion, what do you think the grouping of theaters around Capitol Square (the Orpheum, the Overture Center and the Majestic, to name a few) means to Madison’s identity?

Huge synergy in what each theater can bring and the primary art culture. All have own niche, so there is no competition. Majestic and Barrymore do commercial events, come to Overture for financial reasons. Live Nation does a lot of comedy events. #26 in the world for events. Synergy between what all can provide, provide arts culture. Only reason acts would come to the Overture is money, all are distinctly different. Barrymore came back due to Overture. Pollstar #26 in the World. It’s not about competition, more places, all go up. Last 2.5 years it’s gone up.

a. Nightlife?

All encompassing, offers a minimum of 1 event every day, 7 days a week. For comparison, the Orpheum does mostly late night. Overall boom in bookings 2.5 years ago, in part because there are so many theaters in Madison.

Orpheum is late, so is others. All encompassing; minimum of one event per day, often up to 5, have been 9 on weekends.

b. Weekday or weekend culture?
Record 9 in a day, but usually 7 regular events Friday and Saturday. If an act is popular enough, it doesn’t matter when the event is. Barrymore is doing what it has always done, help from the Orpheum.

Others lose customers on weekdays, they do not.

6) What are your thoughts on theaters hosting political events in the past and in the future? Any specific examples at the Overture Center?

Just do them. Political events come to the theater. For example, could have done Joe Biden (1850 people) if it hadn’t been booked. Provide place and platform for political events.

Political events come to you. Biden called them first, Chelsea Clinton event. Place for communication and thought.

7) What upcoming events at your theater may expand the cultural climate of Madison?

Non-Broadway, more commercial events at the Overture Center, fewer risky events. They also hold conferences and wedding receptions – can do up to 3 wedding receptions in a day.

Non-Broadway going more commercial, fewer riskier shows. More conferences. Also host a lot of wedding receptions, up to 65/70 per year. Promoted shows bring in the most money.

8) What effect to daily business is the fact that your theater is listed on the National Register of Historic Places? In what way does it enhance or complicate management?

Not on register of historic places. Couldn’t have made the renovations that have been if it was on the National Register of Historic Places. Just wanted to retain the street façade community members. Helps because it blended the 100 block and the 200 block better.

Would have ruined many different changes

a. Organ?
Silent film series 1000-1400 people. Still need wiring. It will take $250,000 to restore entire organ, but it will last another 90 years.

Fundraising right now to restore – will last another 90 years. ’83 decided to fix it up, brought silent film series. Some keys don’t work when you play them, that’s why we need restoration.

b. Old façade of Capitol Theater?

Old façade rebuilt – money came out of Gus’s pocket for the Orpheum

Blended the blocks of state street, recognize old theater.

9) Anything else to add?


Politics – wanted vs hated. People thought that it would fail. Uphill battle to get it all done.

Kennedy model city within 2 years. Change through taking leadership in the arts seriously. Stay ahead of the issues, don’t wait.

APPENDIX 4 (original graphic)
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