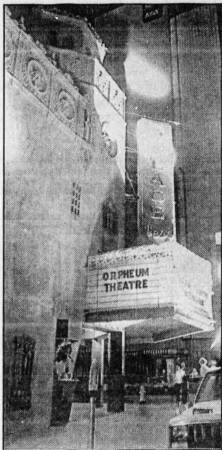


# INTERMISSION AT THE ORPHEUM



## CAST IN GOOD LIGHT

The Orpheum Theatre, scheduled for renovation soon, says good-bye for now at a gala event. Herb (left) and Diane Cummings share a laugh with Penny and Gordon Galarneau.



The curtain is rising on downtown Phoenix. And playing leading roles Saturday night at the Orpheum Theatre were 200 of its most dedicated supporters.

Talk about nostalgia. People did.

"I looked forward to coming down here every weekend with my mother for lunch and a movie when I was about 4 years old," reminisced Linda Messenger, president of the Orpheum Theatre Foundation.

"Our great uncle did all the masonry and iron work," said sisters Helen Wilkerson and Carol Maurer, admiring the original work of Duncan MacDonald. Guests — including Harry Rosenzweig and Joseph E.

## Gala stirs memories of landmark theater, old Phoenix

By Kathy Shocket  
Special for The Arizona Republic

Refsnés, who had attended the theater's 1929 opening — had come to take a last look before restoration started.

That's what the black-tie gala

Intermission at the Orpheum was all about.

"I made my debut right here on this stage with my dance class when I was 6," Carolyn Refsnés Kniazze (Joseph's daughter) said with a laugh. She had come in from Boston for the gala. (In all, three generations of Refsnés were represented.)

After all, the theater (through its incarnations as the Orpheum, Paramount and Palace West) has been a precious part of the state's culture. "Orpheum Theatre Opening Marks Epoch in City History," read a headline in the Jan. 5, 1929, issue of *The Arizona Republic*.

The fund-raiser marked a new

— See GALA, page C4



## SITTING PRETTY

Liz Topete Stonefield, the special-events chairwoman, tries the best — and only — seat in the house as Robert Olson (left) speaks with Bobbi and Peter van Dijk.

Photos by  
Chris DeVitto/  
Special for The Arizona Republic

## Gala stirs memories of theater

— GALA, from page C1

chapter in the theater's history and brought together some old friends. Phoenix lawyer Robert Olson, formerly of Cleveland, pulled up with Peter van Dijk, a Cleveland architect chosen for the restoration.

"You couldn't build something like this from scratch today," he said of the theater with its Spanish Baroque Revival architecture.

Van Dijk is no stranger to theater renovation. He was the architect for the Circle Theater in Indianapolis, the home town of the evening's master of ceremonies, Bill Shover.

But Shover, who is director of public affairs for Phoenix Newspapers Inc., is focusing on Phoenix, and he shared with guests a dream of bringing alive the Orpheum's past.

The Light the Lights! vaudeville performance, written by Jack Wilkerson, highlighted the efforts behind the restoration challenge.

"I cried," said Lisa Schrader, chairwoman of the event. Schrader, a member of the Junior League, which worked with Phoenix to get the project off the ground, was reminded that the dream was becoming reality.

As part of the transformation, all but one of the original theater seats have been removed. (The foundation, which was formed last year to assist with the theater restoration, decided to leave one center chair in place. "That used to be one of the best seats in the house," Suzanne Mumford, foundation board member, remembered from childhood and her many trips to the theater. "Now it's the only seat.")

However, new seats in the Orpheum Theatre will become a part of Phoenix downtown's soon-to-be "theater district," along with Herberger Theater Center and Symphony Hall.



Chris DeVitto/Special for The Arizona Republic

## FAMILY TIES

Helen Wilkerson (left) and her sister, Carol Maurer, scan a 1929 newspaper announcing the opening of the Orpheum. Bill Shover, the gala's master of ceremonies, speaks with his mother-in-law, Helen Harkless.



Of course, there are those who support this cultural legacy even though they could not attend Saturday night's party. This group includes the Phoenix electorate. In 1988, voters approved \$7 million for the renovation and restoration of the "grand old lady."

## A boost from Ed Asner

Meanwhile, guess which theater lover was having dinner at Lucia and Wayne Howard's home Friday night.

"I always watched and liked Lou Grant, and now I know I like Ed Asner," Lucia said of the television series' star.

Asner came to town to help raise funds for People to Protect Privacy, a group formed to identify Right to Choose voters. Regardless of whether they agree with Asner's politics, few would dispute that he's the nicest guy.

By sundown about 175 people were munching on homemade Greek dinner delights and mingling in the Howards' back yard.

Asner shared both political views and memories of Arizona with guests.

"I used to pass through Arizona in the Route 66 days, and I remember the fancy ashtrays at the Scottsdale hotels — I never had the guts to take them," he quipped.

## UNDER THE STARS

Michael and Linda Messenger chat with Lisa Schrader (right) during the gala. Linda Messenger is the president of the Orpheum Theatre Foundation; Schrader was the chairwoman of the event.

