Rising to the Challenge

Given all of the uncertainties with the pandemic, the 2020-2021 Season proved to be one of the biggest challenges the Lobero Theatre Foundation has ever had to face. From tough financial decisions in the form of furloughed employees, drastic budget cuts, dealing with lost revenues through show cancellations and the unknown of when we might see a house full of our valued patrons, we were forced to navigate through uncharted waters.

Our fearless Lobero Theatre Foundation board had to be strategic and provide the kind of leadership that ultimately kept the theater solvent, while allowing the Lobero to continue to serve the local arts community by making the stage available at limited expense for virtual events.

The challenges of the pandemic gave us lemons which we ultimately turned into lemonade by creating the debut of the Live from the Lobero streaming series. This successful venture had our hometown Lobero stage go global with e-ticket patrons checking in from 21 foreign countries and all 50 states. This allowed the theater to remain relevant and continue to have meaningful interactions with our supportive Lobero community, whose generosity provided the needed funding to continue our legacy of being Santa Barbara’s cherished community theater since 1873.

The future looks bright and we are full of optimism for what the 2021-2022 Season has already begun offering - a robust calendar of events with ticket sales to match.

Above: The Lobero Theatre broadcast the first of five Live from the Lobero Virtual Concerts featuring Kenny Loggins on June 28, 2020.
Over a century ago, the Lobero Theatre played host to a number of events aimed at generating support for the creation of Cottage Hospital. This noteworthy use of our stage proved incredibly fruitful for our community. Fast-forward more than one hundred years later, to a community hit hard by the pandemic. We have these original visionaries and everyday medical heroes to thank for the world-class medical support available throughout our county. And although the Lobero Theatre might not be in the business of providing healthcare, we are in the business of presenting memorable experiences to our audiences as a beloved performance venue for local youth ballet, jazz quartets, rock icons, and everything in between. We’ll leave the life-saving care to our friends and corporate sponsors at Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital.

In 2023, the Lobero Theatre will celebrate its 150th anniversary. Opened in 1873, the Lobero is the 4th oldest continuously operating performing arts venue in the United States. From providing a stage in 1896 for Susan B. Anthony to champion women’s voting rights, to hosting nearly every important dance, jazz and classical music talent of the 20th century, the Lobero has played an important role in our nation’s cultural history.

The “new” Lobero, which was built on the foundations of the original adobe theater in 1924, was largely designed by Lutah Maria Riggs, whose architectural inspirations helped create what is now the Santa Barbara look. From the 1920s to 40s the Lobero was a popular preview stage for new plays, and welcomed Hollywood actors like Ingrid Bergman, Lucille Ball, Clark Gable, Bing Crosby, Humphrey Bogart and Orson Welles. In more recent times the stage has been filled by talents as varied as Neil Young and Mikhail Baryshnikov.
With history in mind, the Lobero Theatre Foundation was established as a 501c3 non-profit organization in 1938 to act as a steward for and to raise funds to maintain and operate an important historic institution. The Lobero, while dependent on philanthropic annual support, normally relies on the majority of income through ticket sales and rental activity. 2020-2021 could not follow that model, and instead we have our wonderful supporters to thank for genuinely helping the Lobero survive its problematic pandemic patch.

Our community’s initiative and generosity proved once again that ensuring the Lobero remains the vibrant center for performing arts is a priority – one that we continue to ask for your partnership to achieve.

How You Have Sustained Us and Continue to Help

As a nonprofit, we serve multiple philanthropic passions, including, but not limited to:

▶ Preservation of a historic building that is in constant need of upkeep and upgrades – your donations help bring the best stage to your shared community!

▶ Expanding partnership with Santa Barbara’s local arts community. Your gift helps ensure that arts organizations new and old have a home for their artistry and provide a richer culture to our beloved downtown.

▶ Youth programs which are impactful and constantly expanding. Your support helps span the gap in our local schools by providing accessibility to young performers and availability to lower income individuals.

▶ Helping you create your own legacy by naming the Lobero in your Estate Plan. Whether designating to our many performance pillars (American Roots, Dance, Theatre, Chamber Music or Youth), or continuing the ongoing preservation of our historic stage, there is no shortage of just how impactful your legacy might be. If you would like to receive recognition and see the fruits of your investment during your lifetime, an irrevocable planned gift should be considered.
As you can see, expenses were down across the board. Some of this was natural attrition due to an extreme cut to our programming ability. The Board of Directors also had to make some tough decisions, furloughing half of our full-time staff and all part-time positions. Near the end of the 2020-21 fiscal year (ending May 31) we were able to begin bringing back staff and planning events, the first of which was on June 19, 2021.

In a typical year, the Lobero averages approximately 60% in earned income and 40% in contributed income. When the theater was shuttered in March 2020, we were near the end of a banner year for rentals and programming, but we lost nearly 25% of those activities due to the state-wide shut down (March 12 – May 31). Still, you can see how dramatically different the following year was, with only virtual programming possible and earned income down by 90% overall.

One of our earliest moves in 2020 was to avail ourselves of federal emergency funding opportunities, including a PPP loan which we received and was ultimately forgiven. This amount was split between the two years reflected under Foundations/Government. The Shuttered Venues Operating Grant process took much longer than expected, but we are happy to report that we were awarded the grant in August of 2021, so this will be reflected in the coming fiscal year.

We were overwhelmed and deeply humbled by the response we received from the community. Contributed income increased by nearly 15%, making up 91% of our total income for the year. That, coupled with the expense cuts noted above, allowed the Lobero to continue to accomplish our mission and serve the community in a variety of ways. We cannot thank you enough.
Photo By David Bazemore
Joshua Redman Quartet 11/12/19

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