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FEATURES

Center for Performing Arts celebrates 20 years

MICHELLE BRUCH / MBRUCH@SOUTHWESTJOURNAL.COM

SEPTEMBER 7, 2015

UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 11, 2015 - 2:06 PM



Credit: Jackie Hayes, founder of the Center for Performing Arts at 38th & Pleasant. Photo by Amanda Stromquist

It was built in 1923 as a convent, housing nuns affiliated with Incarnation Catholic Church. Then it was a shelter for women. Then New York-transplant Jackie Hayes saw the for-sale sign.

Hayes created the [Center for Performing Arts](#) at 3754 Pleasant Ave. S. 20 years ago, making artist studios out of the nuns' living quarters and converting the chapel and community room into dance studios. In recent years she has leased land for a Kingfield Neighborhood Association community garden. Honeybees managed by the Kingfield neighborhood took up residence in new hives on the rooftop this year. Kingfield is currently constructing a community bread oven onsite, with the first pizzas baking at the Center's anniversary celebration in October.

"They built those buildings to last," said Tom Austin, a cello instructor and one of the longest-running tenants at the Center. "The building is impermeable. The building can't change; the people change."

Back in 1995, Hayes repurposed the top floor into living space for her family. Her children were ages 2 and 5 at the time.

"It allowed me to run a business and be present to my children," Hayes said.

Hayes' daughter, Amanda Stromquist, said she enjoyed growing up in the building.

"There were so many times I'd wake up to different kinds of music," she said.



Stromquist and her brother simply walked down the hall to take all sorts of classes: violin, jazz dance, drum circles, even an inventor class. They discovered that the former chapel was a great place to set up a DJ and have a dance party. Once they hosted a giant game of hide-and-seek in the building.

As a newcomer to Minneapolis, Hayes found it difficult to meet other artists, and the concept of a building filled with artists captured her imagination.

“I knew there was a shortage of inexpensive dance studios in town,” she said.

She also knew that in cities like San Francisco, artists who found studio space weren’t always guaranteed it would remain available to them long-term.

Hayes didn’t have cash at hand for the purchase, but she worked with local banks, lined up tenants and created short-term loan programs among people she knew — all went well, she said, and everyone was paid back with interest.

The Center isn’t a nonprofit, and Hayes wanted it that way.

“It was a fairly risky venture,” she said. “It would have been difficult to convince a board of directors on purchasing this and modeling the financial stability of the place. I needed to be free and take the burden of the risk myself.”

Longtime tenants include Young Dance and the Kingfield Neighborhood Association. The Center also hosts an expressive painting studio and music therapy along with bodywork, hip hop dance, yoga, music instruction and Kung Fu. Hayes offers discounted space for the Fringe Festival, so lots of Fringe Festival auditions and rehearsals also take place at the Center.



“There is very little turnover here,” Hayes said. “A number of tenants have been here ten years-plus. ... We do have a waiting list for space.”

Hayes said she’d like to explore shared studios to make rents even more affordable and provide access to more people.

She estimates that a third of the tenants live in the neighborhood.

“We just added another writer who lives a block away,” she said.

Austin, the aforementioned cello teacher, said he loves the nine-foot ceilings in his studio.

“Even though the studio is not large, the ceilings make for wonderful sound,” he said.

He previously shared a larger corner studio in the building. A student’s mother told him about a nun who gave piano lessons in that same room — with a ruler.

“There aren’t a lot of places like this around town. It’s kind of a rarity, as far as I’m concerned,” said Doug Rohde, who has taught piano lessons in the building since 2010 and took yoga classes in the chapel years before.

“When you walk in, you know this is a place where you go to do something creative,” he said.

Rohde also likes the energy of the building — he’s on the garden level, along with other music teachers, a massage studio and a Sufi prayer group.

“The whole basement is full of music all the time,” he said.

Phala Tracy and Kathy Kienzle pack 15 harps into their Studio Fidicina, where they teach students ages five to 18.

“I love it because it has kind of an old atmosphere, but it’s well-kept, so it’s homey. It feels really warm, as opposed to a newish building,” Kienzle said.

“It’s hard to find a place that will let you do what we do,” said guitar instructor Devin Hill, explaining that he can’t teach guitar next door to a tax accountant in a traditional office building.

Hill said he was glad to find an affordable, accessible place to explore a career in music instruction.

“Everyone here is ... doing something that’s not a normal career path. If you don’t have a place where you can work on that, then you don’t get to find out what your potential was,” he said. “It’s obvious for me that this is what I’m supposed to do.”

Beth Giles made a mid-career change last year and now teaches Nia in the building. Nia is a fitness practice that incorporates dance, different forms of martial arts and mindfulness to work the entire body.



“The world falls away, the chattering mind quiets, it’s pure bliss,” she said.

When she started searching for dance spaces, she loved the sunroom’s wood floor and the idea of joining an arts community.

“For me, a huge part of why I love practicing Nia is it builds a community of people,” she said. “It seemed like a perfect fit to me.”

An anniversary celebration is slated for Oct. 9 from 6-9 p.m. at the Center’s backyard, featuring pizza served from the new community oven. Dancers and guitarists and open mic performers will take the stage throughout the evening, with performances by Leah Nelson, Jon Spayde, Peter Breen, Ben Glaros and Jyre. Artist Kyle Voigtlander will curate a garage installation.

Hayes will also invite guests to help brainstorm the next phase for the Center’s role in the community.

Austin said he’s been impressed with Hayes’ management, particularly neighborhood additions like the community garden.

“They could have taken it over and made an office building out of it,” he said. “Jackie wanted to make something for the community. That kind of attitude has always been there, and I’ve been very appreciative of that.”

Top photo: Harpist Phala Tracy teaches student Gwen Hanson at the Center for Performing Arts. Photo by Tom Roster

Middle photo: Jackie Hayes, founder of the Center for Performing Arts at 38th & Pleasant. Photo by Amanda Stromquist

Bottom photo: Beth Giles teaches Nia at the Center for Performing Arts. Photo by Richard Marshall Photography

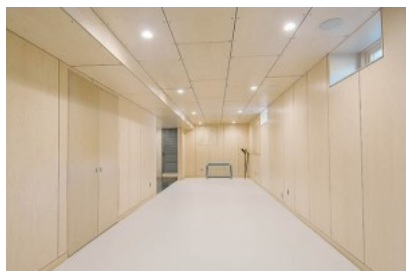
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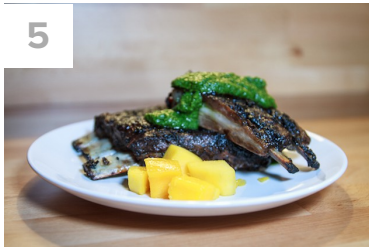


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