

The Count Basie Center for the Arts

A World-Class Facility Built Upon the King of Swing's Legacy

by Jill Ocone

Situated in the heart of Red Bank is New Jersey's premier center for the cultural arts. The Count Basie Center for the Arts, affectionately known as The Basie, is dedicated to fostering powerful, inclusive, artistic experiences and the creative exchange of ideas.

The Basie originally opened its doors in 1926 as Reade's Carlton Theater, and for more than forty years, entertained people of all ages with vaudeville shows, films, local and touring theater productions, and concerts.

Twenty-two years before the birth of Reade's Carlton Theater, William J. "Count" Basie was born to Harvey Lee Basie, a coachman and caretaker, and Lillian Childs Basie, a laundress, about one mile away from his namesake center at 229 Mechanic Street. Basie rose from operating lights during vaudeville shows and improvising piano accompaniments for silent films at movie theaters to being one of the greatest bandleaders of all time. His skill of combining blues and jazz sounds with his own unique style had an enormous influence in shaping what became to be known as the big-band swing sound. In fact, Basie recorded on more than 480 albums in his lifetime, both by himself and with The Count Basie Orchestra.

The nine-time Grammy winner dubbed "The King of Swing" made a homecoming performance at the Carlton with over 1,700 fans in attendance shortly after performing for President John F. Kennedy's 1961 inauguration.

As the Jersey Shore landscape transformed to become dotted with



courtesy of The Count Basie Center for the Arts

The Count Basie Center for the Arts, on Monmouth Street in Red Bank, is known for first class entertainment in an intimate setting.



In 2008, The Basie underwent a massive interior restoration that brought the theater back to its original Spanish-influenced magnificence, similar to how it looked in 1926.

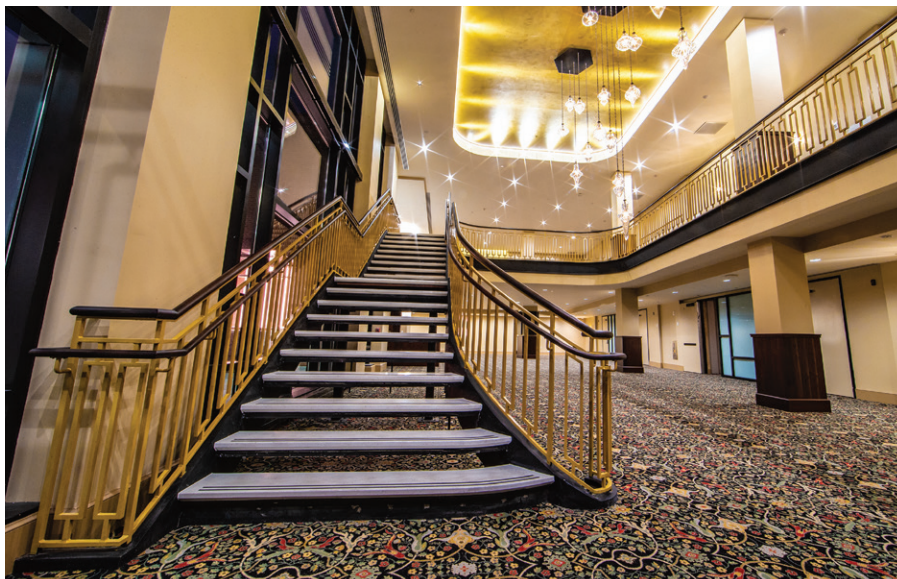
courtesy of The Count Basie Center for the Arts

shopping malls and movie multiplexes, the Carlton, with its gilded-age architecture, fell into disrepair.

The joint efforts of the Junior League of Monmouth County and the New Jersey State Council of the Arts helped create the Monmouth County Arts Council (MCAC), which focused on preserving the Carlton. An anonymous donor allowed the MCAC to purchase the Carlton with the stipulation that the dilapidated theater be renovated into a functional and visually attractive arts center for the entire county.

Thus, the Monmouth Arts Center was born. Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band performed at the new

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The grand staircase in the lobby of The Basie.

courtesy of The Count Basie Center for the Arts

center in August 1974, followed by Basie's return to the iconic stage the same year in celebration of his seventieth birthday.

Basie also graced the Monmouth Arts Center's stage in 1979 for a performance benefiting the A.M.E. Zion Church of Shrewsbury and again in 1983 shortly after the death of his wife, Catherine. Less than a year later, Basie succumbed to cancer, and the Monmouth Arts Center was renamed to honor Basie.

The Basie has since established itself as a nonprofit organization committed to enriching the community's quality of life by generating opportunities for participation in the arts, partnering with schools, collaborating with other mission-based organizations, and promoting regional economic prosperity.

Additionally, it has become one of the nation's most acclaimed centers for the performing arts. In 2008, The Basie underwent a massive interior restoration that brought the theater back to its original Spanish-influenced magnificence, similar to how it looked in 1926. The building's exterior facade was restored in 2010, and today, The Basie's influence stretches well beyond the build-

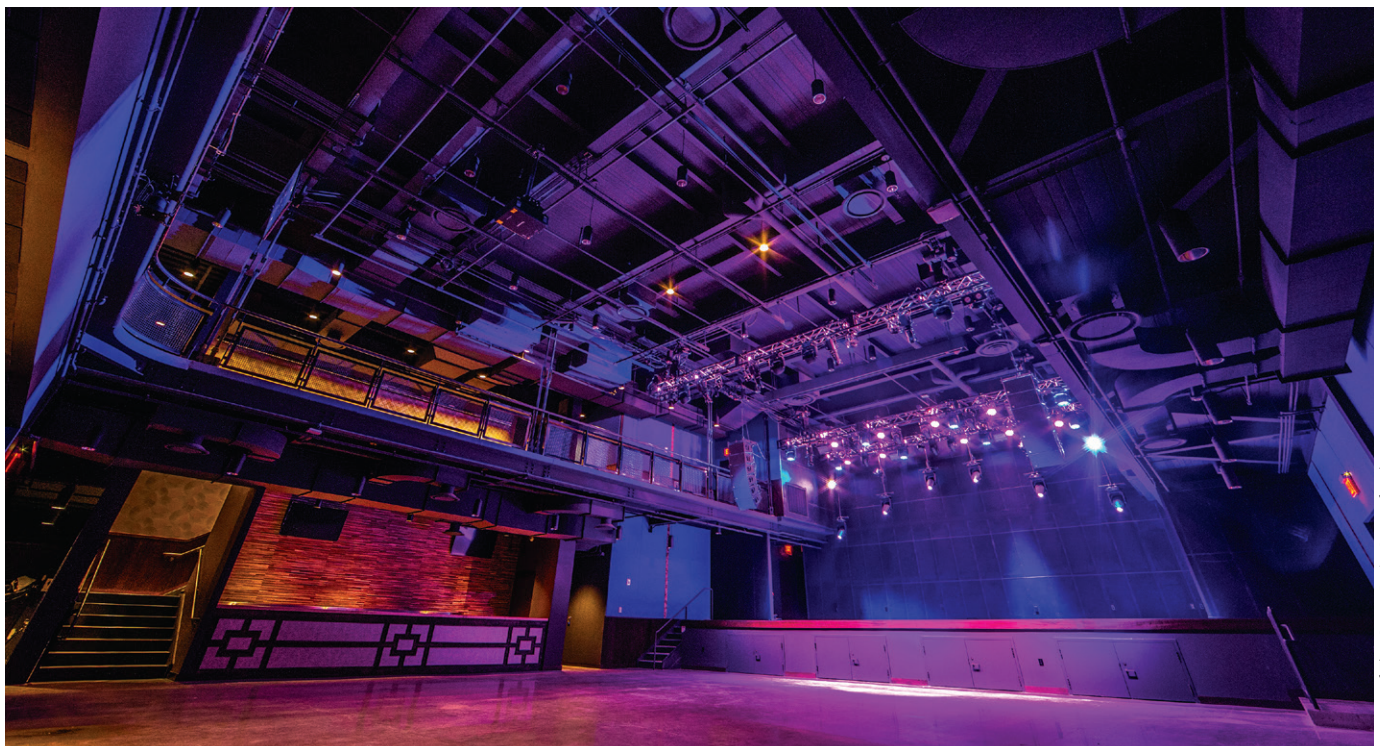


Performance at The Basie Center's Hackensack Meridian Health Theatre.

ing's Monmouth Street walls.

Renamed in 2018, **The Hackensack Meridian Health Theatre** is the centerpiece of The Basie and features world-class performances in an intimate setting. Countless preeminent performers have taken the theatre's stage, including James Brown, Tony Bennett, Al Green, George Carlin, Counting Crows, "Weird Al" Yankovic, Jon Bon Jovi, and Jon Stewart. While the theatre's lights were dark during the pandemic, both new and old feet once again stand upon its stage almost every night of the week.

The Vogel, a second state-of-the-art performance venue, was officially unveiled in October 2020 after almost four years in the making. Named for area philanthropists Anne and Sheldon Vogel in recognition of their support of The Basie, the 20,000 square-foot, balconied, two-level venue's original opening was planned for June 2020, but like everything else, was delayed by the pandemic. However, organizers realized The Vogel was a diamond in the rough and could provide a way to generate revenue after enduring



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The Grunin Arts and Education Building provides new classrooms as well as studio and performance space as part of The Count Basie Center Academy of the Arts programming.

months of hardship. The Basie followed strict Covid-19 regulations when The Vogel opened and provided a safe way to offer performances to the public. Today, The Vogel offers a wide range of performances in all types of genres.

Basie Center Cinemas, located two blocks away at 36 White Street, shows both current and classic movies on its screen while hosting events such as open mic comedy nights and improv jams on its stage.

The Count Basie Center Academy of the Arts offers a variety of classes, workshops, and events for all ages. Core classes teach fundamental skills to help students grow in areas such as acting, improv, film intensives, and various forms of dance. Recent class offerings include musical theater for teens, commercial agents showcase, a cappella troupe, adult acting, voice overs for commercials and animation, actor showcases, and acting, props, and costume making. Private instruction programs, both in person and virtual, as well as

seasonal classes and one-day workshops, promote both fun and creativity. Student productions take center stage at both the H-M Health Theatre or The Vogel several times each season and provide an opportunity for the community to sit back and enjoy the professionalism and hard work of The Academy's students while escaping into a musical, a play, or a concert.

The Basie strives to be a leading voice, advocate, and destination for arts education and the performing arts while making a regional, national, and global impact. Plans are in the works for an industrious expansion that will potentially double the amount of performance, cultural, and educational offerings while reaching a broader community through new partnerships and programs.

The Count Basie Center for the Arts may be ninety-six years old, but it continues to evolve as a world-class center for arts education, culture, and the performing arts. By harnessing the economic vitality of the arts, enriching the region's quality of

life, and collaborating with creators, organizations, and schools, The Basie Center grows stronger every day as it inspires, educates, and entertains the Jersey Shore and beyond. ♦

The Count Basie Center for the Arts is located at 99 Monmouth Street in Red Bank.

For a list of their shows this season, please refer to pages 31-32.

The Basie relies on financial support from both individuals and corporate partners to fulfill their mission to inspire, educate, and entertain through their distinct and engaging cultural and artistic offerings that embrace and amplify the diversity of the mission. Individual memberships range from \$50. to \$25,000-plus with a variety of levels and benefits for each. The Basie also accepts planned giving, employer-matched charitable gifts, and commemorative giving, which is a way to honor a loved one while providing meaningful support. The Basie is always searching for new corporate and non-profit partners to join them in fulfilling their mission. All donations are tax deductible.

For more information, call (732) 842-9000 or visit www.thebasie.org.