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THE NEW FILLMORE

SAN FRANCISCO ■ SEPTEMBER 2010

What Now for the Clay?

How Theater Dodged a Bullet at Last Minute

By THOMAS REYNOLDS

DISCUSSIONS between owner Balgobind Jaiswal and the San Francisco Film Society began last December after Landmark Theatres decided it could no longer afford to continue to operate the venerable Clay Theater, which has been showing films on Fillmore Street for 100 years.

The lease had actually expired two years earlier.

"The Clay has been in trouble financially for several years," said Ted Mundorff, CEO of Landmark. "So we've been working on what we could do to prolong the probable demise of any single-screen theater."

In January there were further discussions between the Film Society and the owner.

"The best use was the Film Society," Mundorff said. "We thought it was a really good fit."

The Film Society sponsors the San Francisco International Film Festival — the nation's oldest — and programs a screen year-round at the Sundance Kabuki Cinemas in Japantown. The society also sponsors a wide-ranging program of other film-related events throughout the year from its headquarters in the Presidio.

Both the owner and the Film Society found their negotiations frustrating.

"After three months, I could not accomplish anything," said Jaiswal. "So I hired lawyers and spent thousands of dollars and they could not help me. So I took over again. Back and forth, back and forth. It was exhausting. I've been in business for 30 years and I've never seen anything like this."

"We don't know what he wants," countered Leggat, head of the Film Society. "It's like trying to hit a target in the dark."

Landmark agreed to keep the theater operating while the landlord and the Film Society negotiated, hoping there would be a seamless transition.



A CENTURY OF FILM — The Clay Theater has been in business on Fillmore Street for 100 years, primarily showing foreign films. In better days — when its neon signage still lit up the night — the theater hosted exclusives and premieres.

"But that didn't work out," Mundorff said. "It didn't seem to be going anywhere. We were at the end of our rope. All I could do was bring them to the altar — I couldn't make them marry."

So on August 10 Mundorff made the call he had hoped to avoid. He told Clay Theater manager Chris Hatfield to prepare to shut down the theater at the end of the month. The staff posted a notice in the box office window announcing that Sunday, August 29, would be the Clay's final day, and word — and shock and dismay — began to spread through the neighborhood and the city's film community.

At that point, Leggat and supporters of the Film Society decided to go

public with their attempt to get the owner of the Clay to rent or sell them the theater. Leggat said the society offered to match the rent Landmark was paying — even though he said the theater does not comply with disability requirements and needed at least \$200,000 in improvements.

"We're willing to refurbish and re-energize the Clay," he said in mid-August. "We care deeply about the soil in which we're planted."

As the Clay's final weekend approached, Mundorff flew up from Landmark's Los Angeles headquarters. A San Francisco native who grew up in the Sunset — and whose parents enjoyed seeing movies at the Clay —

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Film Society, Owner Agree to Resume Talks

THE OWNER of the Clay Theater has invited leaders of the San Francisco Film Society to meet on September 13 to resume discussions about the Film Society's desire to lease the historic Fillmore art house.

Graham Leggat, executive director of the society, said he is eager to proceed.

"It's certainly progress," Leggat said. "It's a better sign. How good it is remains to be seen."

At the same time, owner Balgobind Jaiswal — who also owns the Blu and Cielo women's clothing boutiques on Fillmore Street, as well as the building that houses Marc by Marc Jacobs — has retained an architect who is exploring how the Clay might be reconfigured to accommodate three smaller theaters. And he may seek to build four townhouses on top of the theaters to help fund the project.

"We are committed to keeping it as a theater," Jaiswal said. "We are trying to find a long-term solution, rather than being back in the same situation in two years."

Jaiswal has retained Charles Kahn, a Berkeley architect who he said "has worked with Landmark Theatres and is quite familiar with the problems of single-screen movie theaters and how to go about making the theater more viable."

Leggat said he expects to meet with both Jaiswal and Kahn.

"It's a question of the details," Leggat said. "There's nothing entirely sacrosanct about a single-screen theater. It would strictly be a question of how good the designs are." The bigger issue, Leggat said, is what kind of improvements the building needs and who pays for them.

Neighborhood residents appeared before the city's Historic Preservation Commission on September 1 to request the Clay be designated a city landmark. That would protect the architecture. Any change of use would require a conditional use permit. The addition of residential units might also require an environmental impact report.

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Mary Ellen Pleasant (in black) is among the notable San Franciscans included in a mural in the lobby of the Monadnock Building at 685 Market Street created by neighborhood artists Mark Evans and Charlie Brown. Others (from left) are politician Harvey Milk, actress Lotta Crabtree, architect Bernard Maybeck and dancer Isadora Duncan.

SHE LIVES ON

Mary Ellen Pleasant is still making appearances

LAST MONTH'S STORY on the legendary Mary Ellen Pleasant ["Don't Call her Mammy," August 2010] chronicled her rise from slavery to abolitionist to millionaire San Francisco businesswoman. Operating from her 30-room estate at Bush and Octavia, Pleasant was both praised and pilloried for her businesses and bravery, earning her a range of monikers, including madam, murderer, voodoo queen and ghost.

As it happens, Pleasant's spirit has resurfaced during the last few weeks in several apparitions around the city.

Pleasant makes an appearance in the Archive Room on the main floor of the California Supreme Court, at 350 McAllister Street, in an installment on the state's early legal history titled "Civil and Uncivil: Constitutional Rights in California."

Her place in legal history was secured when a streetcar conductor in North Beach refused to stop and allow her to board. When a passenger urged him to stop, the conductor replied: "We don't take colored people in the cars."

Pleasant sued, blazing a trail for civil rights in the state — and earning her another moniker as the "mother of civil rights in California." She won, but the California Supreme Court overturned the judgment in 1868. Nonetheless, her case

was the impetus for a statute passed in 1893 prohibiting segregation and exclusion on streetcars.

Pleasant also appears in a mural in the lobby of the Monadnock Building at 685 Market Street. She is depicted in profile in the shadows of a mural titled "San Francisco Renaissance" with other local icons and rabble-rousers.

And Pleasant is the main attraction in the San Francisco Ghost Hunt, a three-hour walking tour that promises to unveil the city's "most notorious historic haunted places" and introduce "real ghosts from wild and romantic times gone by."

The tour begins nightly, except on Tuesdays, at 7 p.m. at the Queen Anne Hotel at 1590 Sutter, just across the street from the park in her honor at Octavia and Bush, where Pleasant's spirit is said to endure.

Ghost Hunt warns: "People who say bad things about her in the park have had objects dropped on their head, or fallen suddenly as if pushed. The sudden appearance of a crow seems to herald Mary's presence, and she has even taken her human form and walked among the trees and bushes. If you make a respectful request of the voodoo priestess on that corner, and find favor with Mary, it is said that your request will come true."

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■ NEW NEIGHBOR



A salon meant to be

A bright orange awning at 2434 California Street heralds the arrival of SALON YUNI.

Owned by local resident Yuni Cho, the salon manages to be both homey and starkly modern, with a mostly white interior accented by fuchsia touches and eight orange client chairs.

Cho says the decision to open the new salon was spurred by an unwelcome intruder: "I had breast cancer last year," she says, "and it changed my life to a different view." With chemo and radiation now behind her, Cho sports a jaunty wig and surveys her new digs with pride. She worked at the Lotte salon on Fillmore for seven years and at a number of other neighborhood salons before opening her own.

"It was really meant to be," she says of her new salon, which is just a half-block from her home. In search of a health club, Cho wandered into Fit-Lite — the previous tenant — and learned it was closing in two weeks.

"The spot was a little big — and that scared me. But every time I passed by, it called out to me," says Cho. "I always dreamed I'd have my own salon in Pacific Heights. But I never thought I could be so close to home."

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Young Activists Vow to Fight on Union St.

Bring back the fun, say the leaders of a feisty new 'enrichment association'

WITH THE opening of a number of new restaurants, Union Street is showing signs of recovery from the economic doldrums that led to a spate of shuttered shops on the street.

But a new group of young residents and business owners says more aggressive change is needed in the neighborhood, and has formed the Union Street Enrichment Association to do the job.

"Save Union Street" is the battle cry and the name of a new Facebook page, which proclaims: "Union Street in Cow Hollow has gone from a busy street with lots of businesses to a ghost town filled with boarded-up remnants of days gone by."

"The Union Street Enrichment Association was sparked out of a need to save Union Street from a long stretch of vacancies and failed business driven by archaic local association practices, real-estate profiteers and shortsighted residents," said Phil Boissiere, one of the leaders of the new group. "The goal of the new youthful association is to transform Union Street into a vibrant, economically healthy community center."

The group was spurred by growing frustration among younger merchants and residents, who say old-timers have sapped the life from Union Street and opposed new businesses that could bring fresh energy to the street. They were prompted to action when Giordano Brothers, a North Beach eatery, was denied a permit to open on Union Street earlier this year after nearby residents complained.



New restaurants — including Cafe Des Amis, right — have helped Union Street businesses rebound, but a new group says a more youthful attitude is needed.

Their frustration grew when one of Union Street's new bar-restaurants, the Brick Yard, was halted by the city from creating an outdoor patio fronting Union Street because it did not have proper permits. The patio was formerly enclosed.

Boissiere promised "all hell's gonna break loose" when the issue comes before the Planning Commission this fall.

Complainers "are now trying to prevent outdoor seating and other creative means to bring business to Union Street," Boissiere said. "All of this is culminating on the heels of the apparent war on fun that the Alcoholic Beverage Control has been waging on San Francisco nightlife."

The Brick Yard hosted the group's public launch party on August 30. A full house of young enthusiasts showed up for \$2 beers and exhortations from group leaders and local politicians to become more involved in civic affairs. City Attorney Dennis Herrera and Supervisor Bevan Duffy — both mayoral aspirants — and several candidates for the board of supervisors were also there, along with a representative from the League of Women Voters offering to register people to vote.

Boissiere called the insurgent organization a "resistance movement against the established merchants and their failing association."

Leslie Leonhardt, executive director of the Union Street Association, a long-standing coalition of local merchants, said business on Union Street is finally improving, and credits new restaurants — especially the upscale Cafe Des Amis — with driving the recovery.

"We don't have a dispute with them," she said of the new association. "We want them to thrive. We want to all work together."

Leaders of the Union Street Association were not invited to the Brick Yard party, and the head of a local residents association was turned away.



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The Facts About Health Care for City Workers Under Prop. B

by Jeff Adachi

Proposition B, which will be on the ballot in November, addresses not only the City's escalating pension costs for city employees, but also health care costs. There are two provisions to the measure. The first requires all city employees, including elected officials, to contribute between 9-10 percent towards their retirement pensions. Currently, nearly half of City employees do not contribute towards their pensions. The second requires that city employees contribute more towards their family's health care costs.

Here are the facts about the costs of health care to taxpayers for the city's 26,000 employees and 28,000 retirees:

Currently, the City is spending \$456 million for city employee and dependent health care each year. According to the City Controller, this number is expected to double within five years.

The Controller estimates that the City's retiree unfunded health care liability is growing by \$300 million annually.

Under Proposition B, all City employees and retirees will continue to receive 100 percent of their health-care benefits paid. However, instead of the City paying 75 percent of dependent health care costs, all City employees will share 50-50 in the cost of the healthcare for their dependents.

THE WAY IT IS NOW – Under the lowest cost health plan:

- A city worker with no dependents pays nothing for his or her healthcare and the City pays \$481.70 per month.
- A city worker with one dependent pays \$8.84 per month and the City pays \$953.50 a month.
- A city worker with two or more dependents pays \$228 per month and the City pays \$1,132.54 a month.
- All of these payments into healthcare by city employees are with pre-tax dollars.

UNDER PROPOSITION B:

- A city worker without dependents would still pay nothing.
- A city worker with one dependent would pay, on average, \$241.76 per month.
- A city worker with two dependents would pay \$439.79 per month.

(Source: City Controller, Department of Human Resources, Health Service System)

COMPARED to what the average private sector employees receive:

- Only 60 percent of San Francisco businesses offer health care benefits for employees.
- Private sector employees with no dependents who do receive health care must pay an average monthly cost of \$402 (compared to City employees who contribute nothing) and pay \$1,114.58 with dependents.
- And while 100 percent of public sector employees receive retiree health benefits, only 29 percent of private sector employees receive

such benefits.

Keep in mind that the average San Francisco city employee earns \$93,000 a year, not including benefits, compared to \$46,000, which is what the average private sector employee who works in San Francisco earns.

According to the Health Service System, Proposition B would save the City \$83.3 million annually in health care costs. Some of these funds can be used to preserve health programs for vulnerable adults and children who do not have health care coverage.

Even with these changes, City employees will receive a benefit package that is unparalleled in the private sector. More importantly, however, the City's health care fund will be made more sustainable and the savings from this measure will help preserve the essential services that are relied upon by all San Franciscans.

Opponents of Prop B have said: In the voter's guide, the opponent's argument states that Prop B "cuts health care benefits for widows and children of police officers or firefighters killed in the line of duty."

This is untrue. Under California state law (section 4856 of the Labor Code, passed in 1997) families of deceased public safety officers are entitled to receive health benefits "under the same terms and conditions prior to the death of the employee." Proposition B does not change this. In addition, under the federal Public Safety Officers' Act, widows and children of police officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty receive \$275,000.

The opponents have also declared that Proposition fails to "distinguish between low-wage and highly-paid workers." San Francisco has never based contributions by city employees on the income level of its employees. All employees have always paid the same amount, regardless of their income level. Proposition B does not change this.

The opponents also say that Proposition B "makes San Francisco ineligible for \$23 million a year in federal health care reform funding." This is not true. Nothing in Proposition B makes San Francisco ineligible for federal reimbursement of health care costs.

Proposition B creates a reliable, annual funding stream of support as opposed to "one time" savings measures and uncertain state and federal revenue that San Francisco can't always count on.

This is why 49,178 San Francisco voters signed the petition to put Proposition B on the ballot.

VOTE YES on Proposition B! For more information, please visit www.sfsmartreform.com or to help on the Prop B campaign, call (415) 905-9100.

Jeff Adachi is the public defender for the City and County of San Francisco.

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CRIME WATCH

Malicious Mischief California and Fillmore Streets August 8, 7:45 p.m.

An officer received a call from a restaurant concerning a man who had broken a glass door. The officer spoke with the restaurant manager while additional police searched the immediate area. The manager said the suspect walked into the restaurant and asked for a can opener. The manager, who was busy with customers, told the man she didn't have time to look for one. When the man angrily shouted expletives, the manager told him to leave, which made him even angrier. He finally did leave the restaurant, slamming the door behind him and shattering the glass. Officers located a man nearby who matched the suspect's description and the manager signed a citizen's arrest form. The man was cited for the offense and must appear in court at a later date.

Burglary, Unlawful Entry Fillmore and Ellis Streets August 16, 12 p.m.

An officer viewed a videotape of a burglary in progress featuring a man breaking into a business on Fillmore Street. Later the officer was in court to testify on a criminal case when the individual he had seen on the videotape walked into the courtroom. The officer alerted several other policemen nearby and took him into custody.

Burglary Webster and Ellis Streets August 17, 3:15 p.m.

Officers received a call from a local grocery store; a security officer was detaining an individual. Officers at the scene were told a man walked into the store, picked up four boxes of Advil and walked out without

paying. The security officer signed a citizen's arrest form. The suspect was booked for burglary at Northern Station.

Driving Under the Influence Geary Boulevard and Laguna Street August 18, 6:45 p.m.

Officers responded to a report of a man who was driving in a reckless manner. A few minutes later, another officer received a call concerning a male driver who had passed out behind the wheel of a car. They soon discovered both reports involved the same individual. A medic accompanied investigating officers to the scene to make certain there was no medical emergency. They determined the man was unable to answer simple preliminary questions and was too unstable on his feet to perform the field sobriety test. A breathalyzer test showed his alcohol level was .32, four times the legal limit. The suspect was booked into county jail.

Vandalism to Vehicle, Resisting Arrest Fillmore and Pine Streets August 19, 11:45 p.m.

A caller reported that a man attacked a taxi driver. When officers arrived, they found the suspect pacing and shouting obscenities. The taxi driver told the officers that the man tried to flag down his cab. As he drove past, the man threw his backpack at the cab, then ran up to the vehicle and swore at the driver. He punched the cab's windows, then kicked the mirror and broke it. The driver signed a citizen's arrest form for damages to the car. The suspect was intoxicated. As the officers were attempting to place him in the police car, he started fighting with them. Eventually the officers subdued him and he was booked at county jail.

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City College Update

By Dr. Anita Grier

Whenever I speak about City College, the well-publicized misuse of public funds in 2005-6 dominates the conversation; people want to know what went on behind the scenes and how such abuses escaped notice of the Board of Trustees.

- How could \$10,000 for rent on a college parking lot be diverted to a political campaign—even a campaign for

City College improvements?

- How could \$28,670 raised by PepsiCo for beverage sales on campus be diverted to the Foundation of City College, a politically active organization?
- How could public funds, \$7,000 from the non-profit College Bookstore Auxiliary and \$3,000 from a campus coffee shop, end up as political donations?
- Are there other misuses that have yet to be discovered?

I can't comment on specific charges until the case is settled, but I believe the oversight role of the Board of Trustees needs to be enhanced in order to prevent future questionable expenditures. I don't believe that any of the current members of the Board had any knowledge of the funds in question, but we are obliged to ask why we were left in the dark about these transactions.

I believe we need to adopt San Francisco's Sunshine laws to make our records more easily available to the public, the press, and the Trustees. Four years ago I drafted and proposed that similar laws be adopted by the Trustees that would mirror San Francisco's improved access to records but the administration at City College has been dragging its feet on implementation, presumably to keep its records out of the public eye.

The current standard for open records at City College is the California Public Records Act, which provides minimal access. It has gaping holes so large that bureaucrats can simply ignore requests, refusing to release documents just because they allege it is not "in the public interest" to release them. In effect, this gives every employee veto power over disclosure of records and has been one of the most misused sections of the CPRA.

San Francisco voters approved Sunshine (Prop G) in 1999, allowing much stronger public access to records. The Board of Trustees approved similar changes four years ago, and recommended that the various departments and organizations within the institution review their procedures and evaluate the specific changes set forth by the Trustees.

What's happened since? We know very little. We do know that at one point our attorney advised that the documents were "lost."

Last month I reintroduced the Sunshine measure and at the next meeting of the Trustees it will be considered. At a preliminary hearing, there were no dissenting comments from my colleagues, i.e., we appear close to agreement.

Sunshine will ban the "public interest" withholding maneuver, and include a 24-hour Immediate Disclosure requirement. We still need to be vigilant, of course, but with this better access, City College of San Francisco will take the lead towards open government among community colleges in California.

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New artificial turf playing fields are already in use at Kimbell Field, and a new playground is in the works for the adjacent park.

Foxtail Hunt, Fall Social at Lafayette Park

ANTICIPATING Indian summer weather, the Friends of Lafayette Park will hold a free fall social in the park on Friday, September 24, from 5 to 7 p.m. featuring refreshments and live entertainment.

It's one of several neighborhood events concerning the park scheduled this month.

The Friends are working in cooperation with the city's Recreation and Parks Department on a \$10 million renovation of the park. Improvements are planned to the playground, tennis courts, dog run area, paths, irrigation and other amenities. The second of three community planning sessions for the renovation will be held on Monday, September 27, at 7 p.m. The location is still to be determined.

On Saturday, September 11, from 9 a.m. to noon, the semi-annual foxtail hunt at the park is scheduled. Work will focus on weeding toxic foxtails, which can be fatal to dogs if ingested.

The Friends of Lafayette Park formed to bring neighbors together to enjoy and improve the park. Among the group's regular activities is a park cleaning and greening workday on the first Saturday of each month. Experienced gardeners supervise volunteers, and tools and gloves are provided, although volunteers are encouraged to bring their own small weeding tools and gloves.

To get involved, or for more information on activities at Lafayette Park, go to friendsoflafayettepark.org.

There's also a batting cage, the only one in a San Francisco park.

With the recent reopening of Hamilton Recreation Center on the north side of Geary, the recreational facilities in the neighborhood have been almost entirely revamped and upgraded.

The remaining project is the construction of a playground in Kimbell Park, which is adjacent to the playing fields. A new group, Friends of Kimbell Park, is making recommendations. For more information, go to friendsofkimbellpark.weebly.com.

Field at Steiner and Geary. There will also be music and sports demonstrations.

The playing fields have already been in use by sports teams for much of the summer. The new artificial turf fields are permanently lined for soccer, football, baseball, softball and lacrosse. City Fields Foundation, which funded the renovation and operates the fields, estimates an additional 3,580 hours of playing time are now available because of the artificial turf, which is impervious to weather. There are new bleachers, benches, bathrooms and lights.

Street Party, Park Celebration Coming Sept. 19

JAPANTOWN and the Fillmore will be at the heart of the action when the city's Sunday Streets program comes to the neighborhood on September 19.

Parts of Post and Fillmore Streets will be closed to traffic from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and turned over to pedestrians, cyclists, runners and dancers. The route extends south through the Western Addition including Jefferson Square and Alamo Square.

Between noon and 3 p.m., a community barbecue and picnic will celebrate the grand opening of the recently renovated Kimbell

BODY & SOUL

BY DAVID MCGUIRE

IWORK in a health club in the neighborhood — the Pacific Heights Health Club on Pine near Fillmore — and I love it there: great vibe, wonderful people, tons of fun equipment. I'll never complain about my workout facility or its ability to kick my behind.

But sometimes a voice inside tells me to bust out of the club and take it outside. Seriously, I hear it loud and clear. And I think everyone should listen to that voice once in a while. Your body needs it. Your spirit needs it. You need it.

Breathing fresh air is free, mind-clearing, positive-thought-generating therapy. We spend more than enough time confined inside, inhaling filtered air and walking on flat, carpeted, boring surfaces.

But outside is life at its best — an uncontrolled environment that challenges your entire body and all of its systems, nervous to circulatory. The up and down terrain and changing temperatures outside offer our bodies many challenges that simply can't be found within the four walls of a gym. Outside surfaces that are unstable, unpredictable and multilevel turn your balance up a notch and force many of the small stabilizer muscles within your body to step it up, get busy and stay the course.

The perfect outdoor gym is right here in our neighborhood. Alta Plaza Park looks as if it were designed by someone who enjoyed exercising outside. The grand stairs facing Clay Street, for example, scream



Fresh air is free, mind-clearing, positive-thought-generating therapy, says local trainer David McGuire.

Alta Plaza: Perfect Outdoor Gym

Turning all those steps into a free fitness program

interval training: four perfectly identical short sets of stairs to sprint and walk up in countless different ways. The little set of stairs right before the very top should be called the "Be Proud of Yourself" stairs, because if you start at the bottom and make it to the top without stopping, you deserve to give yourself a pat on the back. When you're done with that, start your descent back to Clay Street and climb again. The second set is always easier than the first.

A few more possibilities for an exciting workout on the stairs at Alta Plaza:

- Do all four flights once and time yourself. Now beat it. Now do them two at a time.

- See how many times you can do all four sets, top to bottom, in 20 minutes.

- Do 15 push-ups at the top of every set.

- Travel up each set sideways, changing your lead leg with every flight of stairs.

- Try to jump up every other step. How far can you go? Take your time and be confident.

These options are far more challenging and exciting than the controls on any piece of cardio equipment. And the view of the city from the top of the park makes any climb worth it.

We're heading into one of the best times of year in the city. Following behind the frigid weather we've been having is an Indian Summer preparing to call us out to play. There are going to be perfect, sunny, warm, wonderful days when that little voice is yelling at you to get outside. Listen and obey.

The air will be clear, the sun will be shining and the Alta Plaza stairs will be waiting for you. Challenge yourself and your body a little differently and resist the familiarity, comfort and routine of your workout.

The Stairmaster or treadmill won't mind a day off — and your muscles will be thrilled with the new stimulation.

David McGuire, a certified personal trainer and group exercise instructor, runs an outdoor fitness and personal training business at dmcguirefitness.com.

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News of Reprieve Came at Midnight

► FROM PAGE ONE

he found the final days difficult. He was at the Clay when the last show let out on Thursday, and employees and former employees were stopping by to say goodbye to the theater.

"It was a very, very emotional time for everyone in the organization," Mundorff said. "We don't like losing one of our children." He added: "I would feel this way in any other city, but probably not as much. San Francisco is dear to me."

The next day, on Friday, August 27, he was in contact with the landlord.

"It was hopeful during Friday's discussions that we could make something happen," Mundorff said. An agreement was finally struck in the early hours Saturday morning to keep the Clay operating.

"It was terrific," he said. "We were ecstatic about continuing to operate the theater and our landlord was happy, too." He called the Clay Saturday afternoon and told the staff there was a reprieve. "I felt a little like the governor picking up the phone to call San Quentin," he recalled.

"We were already in the process of making plans to leave" when the call came from Mundorff, said Hatfield. "We were told to stop — that we would be sticking around for a while."



At the Clay, as at other theaters, the concession stand is an important source of revenue.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHRYN AMMOTT

As it happened, the Clay was scheduled to host a final midnight showing of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* on Saturday night. As *Rocky Horror* fans lined up in costume for one final showing and sing-along, Hatfield and fellow manager Michael Blythe decided they would announce the good news to the sold-out audience before the film began.

"There couldn't have been a better time," said Hatfield. "We broke the news on stage right then and there. If the theater were any older, it might have shook apart."

"When we made the announcement, the crowd went nuts," said Blythe. "It was a blast. It went from a funeral to a celebration real quick."

Mundorff credits Jaiswal with making

it possible to keep the theater operating.

"Both of us were motivated to keep the theater open," he said. "But the landlord made it happen. Without him, this wouldn't have happened."

He added: "It was a great victory for all of us who love movies."

Said Jaiswal: "They cannot afford to stay here. I told them, 'I'll give you free rent, just pay my property taxes and charges.' It was not easy for me to let Landmark occupy the theater rent free. In the interest of all the merchants and the neighbors, I felt this was the best option."

"No, not for free," Mundorff said when asked about the rent. "But he's been very, very kind."

"This is obviously not a permanent solu-

tion, but it buys us time to find a permanent solution," Jaiswal said. Either party has the option of ending the agreement with 30 days' notice.

"I'm going as long as we can," said Mundorff.

"It is going to be indefinite until I find a solution," said Jaiswal.

By midday Sunday, still suffering from the after-effects of Saturday night's celebration, Blythe was struggling to figure out how to announce the news on the theater's marquee in the limited space and dwindling number of letters available. By the time the 2:30 matinee of *The Concert* began, there was a short but sweet message on the marquee: "THE SHOW GOES ON!"



Proposed hospital and medical office building at Van Ness and Geary (above), patient acute care room (below)

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BY KATHERINE PETRIN

BEFORE THE advent of film, San Francisco was known as a great theatre and live entertainment town. In the pre-earthquake era, before the city was built up and outlying neighborhoods fully developed, "places of amusement" were found throughout the city and included gardens, dance halls, at least one opera house and the Ingleside Racetrack.

Theatres, however, with the exception of the Chinese Theatres at 632 Jackson and 814 Washington Streets and a few others, were located on, or near, Market Street.

Motion picture theatres evolved from turn-of-the-century storefront theatres and nickelodeons to high-style neighborhood playhouses and downtown movie palaces as the result of many economic, cultural, and architectural influences. Architecturally, movie palaces evolved out of the designs of traditional "live" or "legitimate" theatres, as well as other building types such as churches, hotels and royal palaces. However, the first movie theatres were created by modifying existing buildings, retail storefronts or vaudeville theatres. Adding a free-standing ticket booth, bold signage and a brightly lit marquee completed the motif and drew patrons.

Apart from nickelodeons, San Francisco had six dedicated movie houses by 1910, over 30 by 1914, and 63 by 1920.

As the city developed outward, neighborhood movie theatres followed. As going downtown to a movie was more expensive, many people preferred to wait a few weeks and see films within walking distance of home. Most of San Francisco's neighborhood movie theatres opened between 1910 and 1930, in tandem with the development of new neighborhoods along streetcar lines. Gem-sized theatres like the Clay on Fillmore Street or larger theatres like the New Mission and Alexandria were developed in the 1910s and 1920s.

San Francisco's pioneering motion picture families, the Blumenfelds, Levins, Naifys, Nassers, Corts, Jues and, later, the Lees, each developed and operated their own circuits of theatres. Early on, the most prominent theatre operators were Samuel H. Levin, whose theatres included the Metro, Balboa and Harding; and Abraham Nasser, whose holdings included the Alhambra, Castro and Royal Theatres. Other operators owned theatres throughout the city, but most theatres were controlled by one of six or so families.

Nationwide, theatre construction slowed during the Depression. From 1930 to 1932, the number of operating movie theatres decreased from 22,000 to 14,000 as attendance declined. In San Francisco the story

■ EXCERPT



A lavish new book celebrates the city's movie theatres.

Palaces for the People The evolution of film theatres in San Francisco

was no different, with the exception of the Bridge (1939) and the now-demolished Noe (1937). By 1940, post-Depression and pre-television, the number of movie theatres in San Francisco reached an all-time high of 79. The city's population, then close to 635,000, resulted in a per capita count of one theatre per 8,000 people.

Chinese theatres had been in business in Chinatown since the 19th century. Other cinemas screened foreign language films in German, Italian, Filipino or Spanish, specific to a particular neighborhood or ethnic enclave. International cinema arrived on the scene in 1935, when the Clay was re-inaugurated as the Clay International, a showcase for foreign film. After World War II, foreign films came into vogue. In

1949, the World at 649 Broadway switched to a program of international film, as did the Surf on Irving Street eight years later. The Vogue and Bridge Theatres also played foreign films. North Beach's Pagoda Palace showed Chinese films in the 1970s.

The city's film sophistication can be measured by the success of the first international film festival in the United States. Organized in 1957 by Bud Levin, son of Samuel Levin, the two-week event at Union Street's Metro Theatre was modeled on the great international festivals of Cannes, Venice, Berlin and Edinburgh and drew a packed house and Hollywood stars. Across the country, urban centers were in decline and downtown theatres were



Firemen on the roof of the Clay Theater in 1940, when the Hob Nob was next door.

decimated by weak attendance in the 1950s and 1960s. Market Street fell out of fashion as an entertainment district as television gained momentum and middle-class families migrated to the suburbs. Although multiplexes appeared throughout the country by the 1960s, San Francisco had limited potential for such development. Neighborhood theatres remained first-run venues in San Francisco until the late 1980s, long after similar theatres in other cities went dark.

Movie palaces appeared in neighborhood commercial areas initially as less expensive second-run houses. Like Market Street, the concentration of movie theatres on Mission Street made it a destination for entertainment. Between 1906, just after the earthquake, and 1930, more than a dozen motion picture theatres were erected on or adjacent to Mission Street between 16th and 24th Streets. The construction of the New Mission Theatre, and later the El Capitan, both extraordinary movie palaces, confirmed the status of the Mission Street Miracle Mile as a major neighborhood rival to Market Street.

The Fillmore District was a popular entertainment district before the 1906 earthquake, and even more so after. Fillmore theatres included the Harding, Lyric, New Fillmore, Orpheum/Garrick, Princess, Temple, Uptown, Victory and the Chutes at Fillmore and Eddy Streets, which incorporated moving pictures and other amusements. Many of these theatres remained in operation until the redevelopment efforts of the mid 1970s led to demolition.

Neighborhood theatres took on greater prominence when they began to feature first-run movies. Starting in the mid-1950s with *Oklahoma!* at the Coronet, big new releases bypassed Market Street. Despite the general success of neighborhood theatres, overall theatre attendance began to decline in 1949, the same year the Coronet was constructed.

Approximately six theatres were constructed in San Francisco during the 1940s. None were constructed during the 1950s. The last single-screen theatres built in San Francisco were the Northpoint (1966) and the United Artists Cinema Stonetown (1970). Of the surviving San Francisco movie palace buildings — the Alexandria, Alhambra, Avenue, Castro, El Capitan, El Rey and New Mission — only one, the Castro, operates as a film venue. The others exist in varying states of integrity, some irrevocably adapted for other uses.

Excerpted from *Left in the Dark*, published by Charta Books Ltd. For more information, visit leftinthedark.info.



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Harry's Steps Up Its Game

FILLMORE hotspot Harry's is headed for a change. It's not a facelift; the design and decor still look fresh after a quarter century of civilized salooning and dining in the daytime and ear-splitting revelry at night. Instead, the cocktail culture is getting an update by mixologist Michael Callahan, who heads a consultancy called Raising The Bar.

"We're upgrading and fine tuning the bar program, but holding on to the energy," he says.

That translates as better brands in the well for the \$6 cocktails and the addition of rare, small batch spirits such as Clase Azul — which Callahan calls "an amazing sipping tequila" — and the new Beefeater 24 gin, which has 12 botanicals including Japanese and Chinese teas distilled along with the juniper berries.

Callahan, who works behind the bar on weekends, also has an idea for a new twist on bottle service. It's not just a full bottle and four glasses, like pricey nightclubs peddle. Instead, servers will balance a full 750 ml. bottle of Manhattans or Negronis with the four glasses. The cocktails in the bottle will be made nightly, combining the best bourbons, bitters and fresh-squeezed juices. No word on the price yet.

THE HAPPIEST HOUR: Neighborhood



Business is booming at Harry's on Fillmore, but it's upgrading its bar program anyway.

quaffers thirsting for a bargain converge daily between 3 and 7 p.m. at Thai Stick, home of the longest and most affordable happy hour on the boulevard. Draft beers are \$2, the house wine is \$3 and well cocktails are \$4.

A half dozen snacks, at \$5 each, are a happy addition for nibblers. Besides shrimp and springs rolls, a favorite is the chicken satay — six skewers of grilled white meat, with zesty peanut sauce and a tart cucumber salad.

YOU READ IT HERE FIRST: Happy hour at the recently revived Long Bar at Fillmore and Clay is weekdays from 5 to 7 p.m. New owner Reza Esmaili, working behind the bar on a recent Saturday afternoon, was noodling the concept when pressed for details. "Okay, I'll decide right now. All \$5 drafts will be \$3. Certain wines by the glass, normally \$7 and up, will be \$5. Well

cocktails will start at \$6 instead of \$7," he declared. He also promises "vermouth on tap" soon and predicts drinking it straight will become au courant.

And Esmaili says a new chef, known for his American style cooking, will take over the kitchen on September 9, but he won't reveal his identity just yet. And don't be surprised if the Long Bar sports a new name before long.

BETTER BITTERS: When D&M Wine and Liquors opened at Sacramento and Fillmore a few years after Prohibition was repealed, it sold bourbon and beer. Current owner Joe Politz added wine in the early 60s: Gallo, Italian Swiss and Petri by the gallon. "I sold gallons of Red Mountain and told customers it had one grape per bottle," he says.

When other liquor shops added wine, Politz switched to champagne. "Until

10 or 15 years ago, we were the largest champagne retailer in the U.S. We sold more Dom Perignon than anybody," he crows. Now D&M is aiming again to be ahead of its competitors by devoting prime space near the register to an assortment of bitters. Originally an alcoholic remedy for seafaring sailors, bitters punch up everything from cocktails to club soda. In addition to the requisite Angostura, D&M carries German-made Bitter Truth, Fee Brothers, Psychaud from New Orleans and a handful of the estimated 80 brands distilled worldwide. Prices are \$6 to \$17. Serious libation lovers carry their favorite bitters with them.

FINAL CALL: Personable and popular barkeep Fabian Oregon has exited the Elite Cafe after a two and a half years behind the plank. The Napa native, incidentally, was just profiled in the *Examiner's* mixologist column, but cringed at the term as too high-falutin'. Oregon, previously behind the bar for San Francisco saloon legend Perry Butler at Perry's on Sutter Street, is said to be "in discussions" with several third parlors.

Meanwhile, the Elite's 4 to 6 p.m. oyster hour rocks on with California oysters at a buck apiece and Washington State and British Columbia oysters fetching \$2 each. Wash them down with bubbly like Veuve Clicquot at \$12 a flute, versus its usual \$17, or a Schramsberg brut rose for \$9 instead of \$12. Some better wines are discounted during the 120 minutes, too — including Stags Leap chardonnay at \$10, down from \$13 and Cabernet sauvignon blanc at \$9, compared to its usual \$12.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIK ANDERSON

An Eco-Bohemian

Original owner of Frankie's, now a rancher and organic winemaker, returns with new ideas

By ANNE PAFROCKI

Big changes are in store for Frankie's Bohemian Cafe, the bar and restaurant at the corner of Divisadero and Pine that has been a local favorite for nearly two decades, known for its big beers, giant burgers, Czech flair and casual atmosphere.

But soon the mugs of Krusovice beer and bar fare will make way for organic wine and *oog au vin* when the place is reincarnated in late September as Frankie's Bohemian Eco-Kitchen.

Masterminding the rebirth of Frankie's is Pacific Heights resident and original owner Josef Rusnak. Eighteen years ago, Rusnak and his then business partner, Frankie Pazderka, opened the casual dining spot to considerable success.

"I lost the coin toss when it came time to name it," Rusnak says with his devilish



Josef Rusnak is back — with his own wine — at Frankie's, which will undergo a transformation this month.

It's easy to see why Rusnak is such a draw. With his warm wit and friendly manner, he stops to chat with nearly every diner and drinker — kissing women's hands and liberally dispensing hugs and food advice all around. "Tell me before you come in next time," he says to one couple. "I'll make something special."

TO PAGE 12 ►

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Frankie's Gets an Eco-Kitchen, But the Brambory Will Remain

► FROM PAGE 11

Rusnak's passion for food and hospitality originated in his childhood. He split his time between the Czech Republic and Italy and loves the food from both countries.

"My grandfather had a restaurant and a small grappa refinery," he says. "And my grandmother was an excellent cook. She had her own wood oven to bake bread in." At 14, Rusnak decided to enroll in hotel school.

Rusnak is also a wine connoisseur. In Europe, he exported Italian and Spanish wines to Central and Eastern Europe, and he is a licensed sommelier. Now he is also a partner in Beaver Creek Vineyard, an organic winery located in Middletown, in Lake County.

In fact, his connection with Beaver Creek is behind many of the changes coming to Frankie's.

"I have my own ranch with my own animals and vegetables now," he says. "It's all organic. There's no reason to serve anything else if I can serve the best."

All of the produce at Frankie's Bohemian Eco-Kitchen will come from Beaver Creek. And unlike other restaurants with farm-to-table philosophies, Rusnak promises that the food at Frankie's will be affordable, too.

"I won't raise prices," he says, "because there's no middle man — so I don't have to."

The food at the new Frankie's will be inspired by the cuisine of France and Cen-

tral Europe. Rusnak, who created Frankie's current menu 18 years ago, says his new offerings will include *coq au vin*, leg of lamb and duck from Beaver Creek, along with some Hungarian dishes.

He is also planning a more authentic version of Frankie's staple, the brambory. A Czech specialty, the brambory on the current menu was created with the American palate in mind.

"Before, I didn't think Americans wanted an authentic brambory," says Rusnak, "but now I feel differently." The current incarnation is a bit like a large zucchini and potato pancake, with toppings that include cheese, meat and vegetables. "We'll do it Czech style now, with organic pork and sauerkraut," says Rusnak.

Even his signature burgers will be getting an upgrade.

"We're going to start making our own hamburger rolls," he says. "This is an absolute must." Eventually, he also plans to bake homemade pastries, including poppyseed kolache, and breads with walnuts from the vineyard. Wine from Beaver Creek will be available on tap for \$6 a glass, and the wide selection of beers that has been a hallmark of Frankie's will still be available.

Though Frankie's Bohemian Eco-Kitchen will sport an entirely new decor, replacing the current license plates and vintage ads, he wants to maintain the laid-back, friendly atmosphere — and hopes to attract a large neighborhood clientele.

"It's meant to be a place for good, healthy food and fun," he says. "It's really a return to good home cooking," he says.



There'll still be a wide selection of beer on tap at Frankie's, says returning owner Joseph Rusnak, but he'll also offer wine on tap from his organic winery in Lake County.

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2440 Washington St	4	3.5	2	3642	8/13/10	\$2,849,000	\$2,849,000
3368 Jackson St	7	7	2	5673	8/9/10	\$3,995,000	\$3,500,000
3003 Jackson St	4	3.5	2	5142	7/20/10	\$3,500,000	\$3,537,500
2430 Scott St	4	4.5	3	4400	8/3/10	\$4,095,000	\$3,910,000
23 Presidio Ave	5	5	2		8/10/10	\$4,900,000	\$4,585,000

Condos/Co-ops/TICs/Lofts

1450 Post St #202	1	1	1	540	7/19/10	\$200,321	\$175,000
2415 Van Ness Ave #306	1	1	1		7/23/10	\$439,500	\$437,550
1800 Washington St #514	0	1	1	476	7/27/10	\$470,000	\$450,000
1449 Baker St #1	2	1	0	1033	8/11/10	\$474,000	\$469,000
2971 California St #3	1	1	1	676	8/10/10	\$549,000	\$535,000
2999 California St #502	1	1	2	989	8/12/10	\$549,000	\$550,000
2701 Van Ness Ave #302	1	1	1	793	8/13/10	\$589,000	\$575,000
1800 Washington St #815	1	1	1		7/22/10	\$619,500	\$587,500
1877 Greenwich St	2	1	1		7/22/10	\$589,000	\$589,000
1449 Baker St #2	3	2	1	1400	8/11/10	\$699,000	\$693,000
2760 Sacramento St #7	1	1	1	1220	7/28/10	\$749,000	\$743,000
3657 Clay St	2	2	0	988	7/23/10	\$759,000	\$747,000
3544 California St	2	1	1		7/28/10	\$795,000	\$795,000
1568 Union St #203	2	2	1	1101	7/22/10	\$815,000	\$815,000
1701 Jackson St #201	2	2	1	1270	8/10/10	\$829,000	\$818,000
1998 Broadway #1001	2	2	1	1040	7/22/10	\$850,000	\$835,000
1818 Lyon St #A	2	1.5	0	1157	7/27/10	\$849,500	\$849,500
1715 Pierce St #1	2	2	1	1398	8/10/10	\$899,000	\$876,525
2722 Pine St	2	2	1	1396	7/19/10	\$1,095,000	\$1,025,000
2308 Divisadero St #A	2	2	1	1900	8/6/10	\$1,140,000	\$1,110,000
1818 Lyon St	3	3	0	1867	7/23/10	\$1,248,500	\$1,250,000
3316 California St #3	4	3	1	1779	7/27/10	\$1,359,000	\$1,340,000
1943 California St	3	3	2	1990	8/5/10	\$1,375,000	\$1,360,000
2865 Jackson St #5	3	2	1		8/13/10	\$1,595,000	\$1,555,000
3320 Washington St	3	3	1	2335	8/12/10	\$1,950,000	\$1,787,500
2043 Green St	3	2	1	2608	7/16/10	\$1,950,000	\$1,950,000
2353 Pacific Ave #1241	3	3	1	2958	8/12/10	\$2,150,000	\$1,970,000



The Regency-style gem at 23 Presidio Avenue with sweeping views of the Presidio closed at just under \$4.6 million.

A strong showing for summer sales

LAST MONTH 38 listings closed, up from 35 the previous month, with condo sales increasing significantly and single family homes decreasing slightly. The condos that sold spent an average of 69 days on the market, while single family homes averaged 54. All things considered, that's a pretty strong showing for the summer, which is generally a slower market. While historically low interest rates have provided the backbone for sales activity in recent months, lack of new inventory is likely to slow September sales.

Sales in the last month include two properties that bucked the trend toward a longer time on the market and sold quickly. After only 13 days, 3112 Washington Street — a modernized home with more than 2,800 sq. ft. that was originally designed in the early 1900s by noted architect Edgar Matthews — was pending, and ultimately sold slightly over the asking price. In similar fashion, 2816 Laguna Street — an updated 2,934 sq. ft. Victorian — sold in just seven days at more than 10 percent over asking. These sales demonstrate that qualified buyers do respond quickly to well-priced homes in the current market environment. Another notable sale was 23 Presidio Avenue, a Regency-style gem with sweeping views of the Presidio.

Condominiums and TICs generally take longer to sell than single family homes, but for properties that languish, not all hope is lost. A two-bedroom, two-bath condo on Steiner Street that did not garner the desired offer for purchase after 53 days on the market nonetheless generated a lot of interest with renters — and ultimately rented for a very desirable monthly rate with a two-year lease.

NEW LISTINGS: Nestled on a tree-lined block between Pine and Bush in a row of Italianate Victorians, 1719 Broderick Street has quintessential San Francisco period charm with modern updates, including designer kitchen and baths and French doors opening to a peaceful garden. Priced to sell at \$1.575 million, this house is sure to draw buyers returning from their summer vacations. Listed at \$2.775 million, 2416 Gough Street, between Broadway and Vallejo, is an even more spacious early 1900s 3,500 sq. ft. home featuring views of the Golden Gate Bridge from the top level. This home last sold in July 2008 at just over \$2 million. Finally, 1988 Greenwich Street, between Broderick and Webster, is a three-bedroom, two-bath spacious modern condo with abundant storage and two-car garage parking. Aggressively priced at \$879,000, this listing has generated quite a buzz from what appears to be significant pent-up buyer demand in the under \$1 million Cow Hollow condo market.

— Data and commentary provided by VICTORIA STEWART DAVIS at Pacific Union. Contact her at vdvadis@pacunion.com or call 345-3760.



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A Book About Music With More Than Words

In local author's e-book, you hear the performances he's writing about

By MARK J. MITCHELL

YOU MAY have read recently that New York author Pete Hamill's new book is going straight to digital format, skipping print altogether. But the Fillmore's own Arthur Bloomfield has beaten him to it.

Bloomfield's latest book, *More Than the Notes*, made its debut online a few weeks ago at morethanthenotes.com and is available at no charge. In addition to his lyrical prose, it includes more than four and a half hours of music clips, enabling readers to hear the precise performances he's writing about.

Bloomfield is a respected scholar of music, having written *The San Francisco Opera, 1922-1978*. He performed in the Stanford Chorus under both Pierre Monteux and Bruno Walter. He also writes on architecture and cooking in the books *Gables and Fables* and *The Gastronomical Tourist*.

His new book was inspired by a passion for music and the knowledge that there is more to music than the notes on the page. In this era of electronic and digital reproduction, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that each performance of a given piece of music differs from all others. We tend to forget that, if you wanted to hear music as recently as 125 years ago, you had to go where it was being performed or play the music yourself. Bloomfield's book reminds us.

More Than the Notes is about conductors — specifically, conductors who were born in the later half of the 19th century. While we can read about earlier performers and conductors, these are the earliest we can actually hear.

Arthur Bloomfield knows a lot about music and assumes that most of his read-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSIE BECKER

In addition to Arthur Bloomfield's lyrical prose, the e-book includes more than four and a half hours of music clips.

ers will have some familiarity with the terms, the scores and the composers, if not necessarily all of the conductors he has chosen to spotlight. Because he never condescends, he manages to educate gently — at least somewhat gently. Music is about passion and Bloomfield is a passionate listener.

Bloomfield grew up around a radio and heard the various weekly broadcasts by the great American orchestras under some of the best batons of all time. There is a joy to the sections of the book in which he recalls

the old broadcasts and the enthusiasm he discovered as a child and young man hearing the performances. Of course, he also performed under a couple of the batons, which adds a touching human element to his discussions.

It is the insight that Bloomfield brings, however, that will light up any music lover. He discusses each conductor, providing some biographical information — but more important, he goes into detail about specific performances, giving the dates of the recordings or broadcasts.

The book's opening essay on Fritz Reiner gives a sense of his flavor and also his subject:

What, forever asks the commentator, does a conductor really do?

Well, he does the sort of thing Fritz Reiner is doing in the full-page portrait decorating his French RCA recording of the Bach orchestral suites. His baton-holding hand raised crisply above his head, a handsome show of starched white shirt-cuff next thereto, he's fixing the left side of an invisible orchestra with a look that might terrify a Martian, a call to action flamed in part by an instant invocation of stage despair, or maybe it's the sullen dignity of a challenged monarch (here, now, this instant, the most important thing in the world is your entrance!) while his left hand waits in reserve at waist level, ready to italicize a point.

He is, in other words, mesmerizing his musicians into sharing with him one hundred and one percent, as if by instantaneous transfixion, an emotional moment, some superb phraseological felicity transferable by a magnificent glance. Ordered yet passionate, this optical sting is emblem of a style almost stark in its beauty yet rich in nuance of the subtlest and warmest sort.

This word picture conjures the conductor's function as well as Bloomfield's love for music and his musical erudition, which is always laid on lightly.

A few words about the format: This is a book that's available online only at morethanthenotes.com. The conductors are arranged chronologically and you click on a name to read a particular essay. In most books about classical music, there are long musical examples in print. Some books also come with CDs that can be cued up.

But for this book, the online format has a serious advantage. Bloomfield tells you about the details of a performance, then you can click on a link and listen to that exact performance as you read his words. There are also different versions of the same pieces by different conductors, so you can get a strong sense of each musician's personal style.

More Than the Notes will reward you and renew your sense of wonder about serious music. You will find yourself going to your CDs — or vinyl, if you're of a certain age — and checking to see who is conducting and which pieces they perform. It will attune your ear to the differences among conductors and increase your appreciation of music and music making. And it will also entertain you.

Not bad at all for the web.

Neighborhood poet Mark J. Mitchell's first chapbook, Three Visitors, is being released this month by Negative Capability Press.

Discovering the Secrets of the Score

What motivated you to write your new book on legendary conductors of the 19th century?

When I was 11, my mother started taking me downtown once a month to the White House department store. It was where Banana Republic is now. Up on the fourth floor they had a record department. She'd buy me old Victor and Columbia albums. And she also gave me a book of record reviews. I said: "What's the point? Isn't Beethoven's Fifth always the same?" She emphatically said no.

In a way, that was the genesis of this book.

Even then you lived in the neighborhood?

I grew up in Presidio Heights at Clay and Locust and went to the old Town School on Alta Plaza Park. My father was a professor at Stanford Medical School, which is now California Pacific Medical Center. We would take the No. 4 streetcar along Sacramento Street, down Fillmore to Sutter, make a left and go downtown.

And those trips downtown led you to become a music critic.

In the 60s and 70s I was a music critic for the *Call-Bulletin*, which became the *News-Call-Bulletin*, and later for the old *Examiner*. I left the *Examiner* to become a freelance writer, mostly on music and food. I spent a lot of the 1980s researching the conductors book.

You say the book aims to clear up some of the "received wisdom" about conductors. In what way?

I had long felt there was not a book that made a sufficient distinction between conductors — nor a book that told enough about what conductors really do. What are the decisions they make about tempo, balance, etc., all of which can affect the emotion of the performance as it goes from mood to mood.

What this book does, first, is tell the kind of decisions a particular conductor made. You get some sense of how



"What we've done may be unique."

— ARTHUR BLOOMFIELD,
author of *More Than the Notes*

his mind works. And second — and quite important — you get a good idea of the many ways in which the secrets of a score can be discovered. There's a great quote from the English writer and pianist Susan Tomes: "The score is the map, but not the journey."

Your book itself is something of a tome.

It's about 100,000 words. I've been working on it a lot for about four years — but I've been thinking about it for 30 years.

And yet it's not a book, but a website with sound clips.

The advent of the technology — to have sound clips — came at a perfect time. It's on the cutting edge. I

wasn't accustomed to listening to music on my computer, but when I heard the sound coming out, I was ecstatic.

And I had Dick Wahlberg a block up Webster Street to help. He also grew up in Presidio Heights. He uses my basement to store part of his record collection and is a great sound engineer. So I had technical help nearby I'd known forever. We had a number of sessions making the clips and decided together when the clips should begin and end. It was uncanny how often we agreed. Sometimes we worked from 78s, sometimes 33s, sometimes open-reel tapes. I had almost all of the clips in my own record library. Maybe I got a couple from Dick, but between us we had them all.

Then I delivered my text and the master CD with the sound clips to the site designer and engineer. By some mysterious means, they turned them into a website.

What we've done may be unique. Just click on the megaphone and you can play the exact passage in the exact Beethoven score I'm writing about. It's like a time machine.

This is your third book in recent years — and your second online book.

The Gastronomical Tourist was published in 2002 and had a life of its own as a book. Then in 2007 we put it online [at thegastronomicaltourist.com]. The numbers went up from practically zero to 60,000. And *Gables and Fables* — the book of Pacific Heights architectural history based on my wife Anne's columns from the *New Fillmore* — was published in 2007. It's still available at Browser Books on Fillmore.

Has it been an adjustment to see this new book online rather than on the bookshelf?

It's been a revelation. Last night I googled the book. There's something about turning on the screen and seeing all those cross-references. It's satisfying — and you certainly get much better numbers.

I'm a great devotee of Browser Books. I practically live in there sometimes. So it was a little wrenching at first that this new book won't be there, or in the symphony shop. But I've gotten over that.

And it's free. It's there for the tasting.

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