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Howard Theatre Restoration Inc. Unveils Plans for Theatre and Invites Community to Document History

WASHINGTON D.C. – February 22, 2007 – Artists, musicians and community members with memories of the historic Howard Theatre are invited to share their oral histories and memorabilia on Saturday, February 24 at 3 p.m. at The Carnegie at Mount Vernon Square, located at 801 K Street, NW. Washington, DC. The free event, “**The Howard Theatre: Yesterday and Tomorrow,**” will offer live performances, historical background on the venue, and provide the first public viewing of the plans for the renovated theatre. A crew will be on hand to film the oral histories, and to photograph memorabilia that may be included in a documentary on the theatre.

During its heyday, the Howard Theatre, located at 620 T Street, NW, provided a continuous showcase of talent, featuring every major African American performer, including “Duke” Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Marvin Gaye, James Brown, Billy Taylor, Stevie Wonder, and the Supremes.

“This celebration empowers the community to participate in both the theatre’s history and its future,” said Roy “Chip” Ellis, a founding member of Howard Theatre Restoration, Inc. “We are encouraging people to bring in items that capture the spirit of the theatre, including old ticket stubs, program books, photos, autographs, home movies, and the like.”

On Saturday, director and choreographer Mercedes Ellington will be on hand to share memories of legendary performances, including those of her grandfather, jazz great “Duke” Ellington. The celebration will also feature performances from the Washington Jazz Arts Institute, and the Shaw Jr. High School Concert Band, as well as remembrances from artists who performed at, and reporters who covered, the historic theatre.

In addition, plans will be unveiled for The Howard Theatre restoration, located in a revitalized U Street/Shaw Neighborhood community, which will also include new housing, retail and the headquarters for Radio One.

The free event, hosted by the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., the National Music Center, the Museum Foundation, Howard Theatre Restoration Inc., Shaw Main Streets, Inc.; and public radio station WPFW, will shine a light on the theatre’s storied past and provide a glimpse of its bright future.

For more information about the event or to submit oral histories and memorabilia, call Charlotte Fox, (202) 383-1861 or visit www.howardtheatre.org.

About The Howard Theatre

Home to all the great performers from vaudeville and jazz to rhythm and blues and Motown, the Howard Theatre first opened in 1910, two decades before the famed Apollo Theater in Harlem began playing to African American audiences. “Duke” Ellington, who spent his youth in the U Street neighborhood, frequently returned from New York to headline Howard performances.

As young performers, both Ella Fitzgerald and Billy Eckstein won talent nights at the theatre before going on to successful careers. Other renowned performers included Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington, Lena Horne, Lionel Hampton, Sammy Davis Jr.; followed by the Platters, the Marvelettes, and Ahmad Jamal in the 1950s; and James Brown, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, and Dionne Warwick in the 1960s; to name only a few. The theatre closed in the 1970s and has remained empty ever since.

Originally developed and utilized as a live music and theatrical venue in the heart of the historic Shaw neighborhood, the Howard will be restored to that original purpose. The renovation work will recreate the grandeur of the great days of the Howard, and will be limited to the original building, retaining the physical configuration and character defining features. The theatre will also share its rich history through a series of interpretive displays throughout the building, creating ‘theatre as museum’ to enrich, educate, and enlighten patrons and the visiting public.

The entire renovated Howard Theatre will function as a museum or interpretive area, utilizing photographs and artifacts from the theatre and the surrounding neighborhood, and will also serve as the future home of the Washington Jazz Institute. The educational aspect seeks to extend this community nexus into the future by nurturing new generations of performers and appreciators of live entertainment.

The “new” Howard Theatre is expected to offer a balance of national events and community performances. The Howard’s future cabaret-style format will host a variety of cultural events and is expected to lead the rebirth of jazz, R&B, soul, blues, and funk in Washington DC.

Event Organizers

The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., the National Music Center, the Museum Foundation, and Howard Theatre Restoration Inc., all of which are located in the historic Carnegie building at Mount Vernon Square, collaborated to increase awareness of the rich musical history of Washington, D.C. The National Music Center was created in 1999 to showcase and celebrate America’s rich musical heritage. The Historical Society, founded in 1894, collects, preserves, and engages the public in the history of Washington, D.C. Howard Theatre Restoration Inc., is responsible for the redevelopment of the historic Howard Theatre.

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