

# The Prince Music Theater: Alive and Well

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Fans of the musical performing arts will be delighted to learn that, thanks to a group of investors and philanthropists headed by Herb and Karen Lotman, the Prince Music Theater emerged from bankruptcy. The arts organization plans to operate next year as a multi-discipline performance center showcasing world performing arts, touring shows, concerts including indie rock, jazz, blues and classical music, a comedy series and the popular Morgan's Cabaret series. The theater will again be a home to the

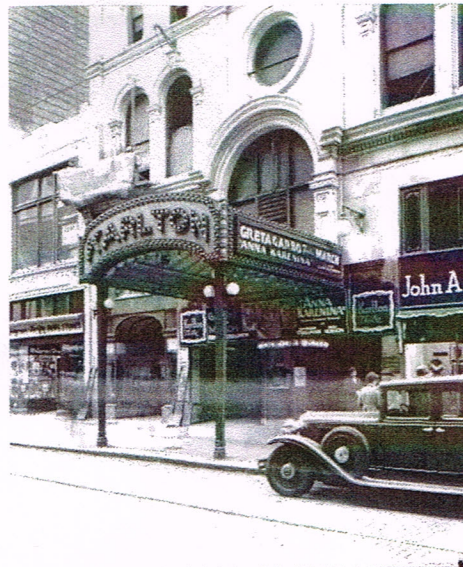
Curtis Opera Theatre and the Philadelphia Film Festival.

What we know today as the Prince Music Theater was originally The American Music Theater Festival, founded in 1984 for the purpose of "nurturing and developing the unique American art form of music theatre of the highest caliber over a wide aesthetic range." This arts organization spent its first 15 years performing a variety of musical

works from Broadway revivals to avant-garde opera in different venues throughout Philadelphia. In 1999, Marjorie Samoff, the organization's founder, former president and production director, moved the Festival to the newly renovated Prince Music Theater named for Broadway producer and director Harold Prince. *Time Magazine* called the Prince Music Theater "the foremost presenter of new and adventurous music theater works in the country."

The Prince Music Theater is housed in an historic building that has opened several times in past years in various incarnations. The original theater, opened in 1921 at 1412 Chestnut Street, was named the Karlton Theater and showed second-run movies. It was acquired in 1943 by William Goldman who re-opened it as a first-run movie theater. It again re-opened in 1950 with the new name, Midtown. Again, in 1980, it re-opened as a twin theater, closing in 1995. In 1999, it opened as a live theater for the American Music Theater Festival. The interior included a new 445-seat main auditorium, a second-floor 150-seat theater and a mural by Al Hirschfeld in the lobby.

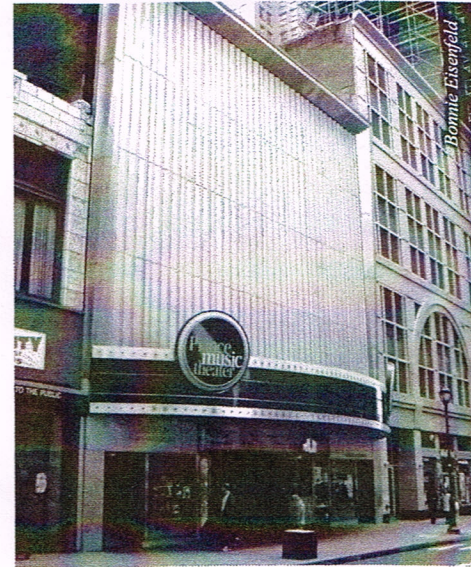
The group of investors, known as the 1412 Chestnut Street Corporation, saved the Prince by purchasing the building at a bankruptcy auction and finalized the sale in the fall of 2012. The performing arts organization will continue to occupy the building under a 25-year lease. According to Chairman Herb Lotman, the 14 new members of the board represent the core of "heroic support from the Philadelphia community to revitalize the Prince Music Theater." The board has named James E. (Jamey) Hines, former artistic administrator of the Mann Center for the Performing Arts, to be the new executive director. Hines was quoted as saying "The Prince made music theater history in its first 25 years. We aim to continue that



The Karlton Theater, which opened in 1921, was the original theater at 1412 Chestnut Street. The photo above dates from 1935.

tradition on a broader scale." The board also recruited as advisors Lawrence J. Wilker, former president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and president of TheatreDreams, and Edward R. Kasses, President and CEO of Princeton Entertainment and the Mann Center's Executive Producer.

Currently, the Prince Music Theater is being renovated with the installation of the latest digital technology in high definition 3D movie projection, improved sound systems and new lighting consoles. New carpeting, flooring and improvements in the concessions are underway.



The Prince Theater today looks much different from when it was the Karlton.

This season the Prince still has two great events coming up. Another opera in the Landmarks of Creativity Opera Cabaret series will be presented: *Satan's Bride* on June 6, 7, 8 and 9. In the Opera & Ballet in Cinema series, the Prince will present *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on June 2 and June 4.

The Prince Music Theater's three performance venues have offered more than 400 performances and screenings each year, attracting 100,000 attendees. AMTF/ Prince Music Theater has mounted 175 productions including 92 world premieres. Check the website for information about current and future programs: [www.princemusictheater.org](http://www.princemusictheater.org)