

CIRCUIT ARTS at THE GRANGE HALL

Circuit Arts, the umbrella organization for The Martha's Vineyard Film Festival, has a long-term lease with the Vineyard Preservation Trust for the theater at the historic Grange Hall. Our aim is to continue the legacy of film, theater, and music programming that has taken place there for over a century.

We provide these cultural activities to the entire community and promote accessibility by offering pay-what-you-can tickets.

Overview

In the spring of 2022 we worked with the Vineyard Preservation Trust to begin technical and accessibility upgrades of the historic theater at the Grange Hall. With generous funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and private donors, we were able to install a new elevator, add cooling capabilities to the HVAC system on the second floor, and install a state of the art screen, projection, and audio systems. With emphasis on creating a welcoming theater space, we reduced capacity to 70 seats, adding couch and ADA accessible seating, so that it feels like the community's living room.

With respect to the history of the venue, we continue to present programs that have long been in the space - film, music, theater, and conversation. In our first 9 months of tenancy we have worked with VPT to create an intimate community gathering space, giving voice to local artists, access to families and students, and celebrating our Black, Brazilian, and Wampanoag communities on the Island.

Programming

From May-October of 2022 we hosted:

- The Martha's Vineyard Film Festival, with 12 screenings at the Grange over 4 days
- The MV Charter School's school play that is now going to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival
- 6 free screenings of the film we created about the health of the Vineyard's Great Ponds
- Music performances by local musicians
- Play readings, including plays from Ukraine to benefit Ukrainian charities
- A summer film series with 3 to 4 films a week in July and August
- Cinema Circus, 6 free children's educational events in the summer months
- Pay-what-you-can film and theater events in the fall, including films by Vineyard filmmakers, performances by local artists, and a mini-fest with free screenings of many of this year's Oscar nominated films

In 2023 we also plan to include:

- A theatrical open mic for local performers
- A music series in collaboration with WMVY
- A play performed and directed by Island Theater Workshop
- Holiday events including a live performed radio play of *A Christmas Carol*

Responding to requests at our community forum and in meetings with community stakeholders, we are working with the Vineyard Preservation Trust to continue to make the downstairs hall available for community use. We recognize the desire for more public events, including town holiday parties, community dances, and potlucks. We are planning with the VPT to bring these festive events to life.

Usage

The theater upstairs is a 36' x 32' area with a proscenium stage and two dressing rooms. The newly installed couch and chair seating accommodate 70 people including 4 wheelchair seats. This means even a full house is less than 60% of the zoned capacity of 125 people. This adds comfort for our audience and a reduction in traffic and noise.

We worked extensively with the VPT team, theater designer and former Vineyard resident Alec Stoll, architect Joshua Gothard, and building inspector Joe Tierney to design a safe, comfortable, and accessible theater.

There is parking on the gravel lot for 107 cars with 8 accessible spots. The full 3.9 acre grounds accommodate 375 cars. Our average event has 20 to 30 cars. Signage guides patrons to park on the gravel lot which also has reserved handicap parking.

For the few events that we do that expect more than 150 people, we have parking attendants and/or a police officer on site to control traffic.

We installed air conditioning and curtains, which allows us to keep the windows closed for noise. All events end before 10pm and we have had no noise complaints during our tenancy.

Support

Since we announced our lease at the Grange Hall, reactions have been overwhelmingly positive. Prior to signing an agreement, the staff of Circuit Arts and VPT connected with every abutter and most homeowners in West Tisbury's village center. These meetings and calls went better than we could have expected. We have received community-wide support, with people writing into the Island newspapers and on social media with a deluge of positive comments. Saying things like, "This is a win for West Tisbury and the whole island." And: "Fantastic! This is a great sign for the new leaders of both of these organizations. I hope more nonprofits can work together like this." And: "I am so thrilled to hear about this! The Grange Hall has always been an important gathering place for us. I'm so glad to see it will be a vibrant center for the community once again."

As we began the process with the Zoning Board of Appeals, we have reached out to many West Tisbury stakeholders. Most recently we sat down with Tara Whiting and Prudy Burt to hear their concerns about our impact on the village center. We pride ourselves on our continued dialogue with community members, and neighboring organizations like the First Congregational Church and the West Tisbury Library. We are excited for these relationships to grow and continue.