



# BIRTHDAY PARTY

*The Belcourt celebrates 10 years in style*

BY CHUCK RAINEY

“It feels good to turn 10,” says Stephanie Silverman, managing director of Nashville’s only remaining independent theatre, The Belcourt. Hidden at 2102 Belcourt Ave., near Bosco’s in the trendy Hillsboro Village area, is an amazing piece of Nashville’s history. Celebrating 85 years as an historic venue and 10 years as a thriving art house cinema, the Belcourt has something to offer everyone.

The theatre’s main hall, called the 1925 Hall, was the first stage for the Grand Ole Opry from 1934 to 1936. It’s currently undergoing comfort and style upgrades, thanks to immense community and member support: New audience seating, carpet and wall drapes will help in celebrating the spectacular summer schedule, including a compelling Kurosawa film series, a members-only gala, the continuation of the free “Second Saturday” outdoor cinema nights and an auction of some of the historic seats that were removed.

“I can’t think of a better birthday present for the hall than these upgrades,” says Silverman. It’s the first upgrade in decades for the venue and \$80,000 was raised to make it happen. “We can’t thank the community enough for their support,” she continues.

Ten years ago, the community around the Belcourt came together to keep the cinema from disappearing like many others in Nashville—the Belle Meade and Melrose, for example. “It was a true neighborhood effort,” explains Silverman, showing the passion she has for the venue and its mission. “Not only was there financial support, but willing hands-on involvement.”

The Belcourt originally opened with film, then music and live performance as well, and Silverman and her team continue those traditions today. This is a community-based, mission-driven theatre that listens to its membership and cares about film in a way that mainstream theatres cannot.

Using modern communication technology and social networking, the Belcourt involves its members, alerting them to events and happening in film—not only locally but nationally as well.

“We have over 30,000 on our email list, 3,500 following us on Twitter and just shy of 7,000 friends on Facebook,” says Haylee Wadley Hall, development and marketing director. “The Belcourt’s birthday celebration is a way for us to give back to our members and the community. As Nashville’s only remaining historic, independent theatre, we listen and try to give members what they want ... great music, incredible independent film programming, children’s events and so much more,” says Hall.

Recognized nationally as one of the most outstanding independent theatres in the country, the Belcourt is the gem of Nashville’s cultural venues. Sundance Institute chose



Photos by Ron Manville.

the venue as one of 14 for inclusion in the prestigious Art House Project. In January, the Belcourt served as an official Sundance Film Festival “outpost,” and featured the premiere of *The Extra Man* to a sold-out audience. March found the theatre solidifying its participation in a reciprocal theatre program with participating independent theatres across the country, allowing members to enjoy their benefits away from home. The Belcourt also remains a leader in the national Art House Convergence program.

The theatre recently installed a new reel-to-reel projection system, allowing them to show films previously unavailable to the venue and giving the viewer an experience almost forgotten in today’s digital age. They also hope to increase their musical shows and possibly add some silent films to the mix soon.

Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa would be 100 years old were he still alive, and in celebration of his nativity, the theatre will run “Kurosawa Centennial Weekend Classics” through August. The “Second Saturday” outdoor cinema is a summer tradition at the Belcourt, featuring films suggested by the membership. July 10, the bill offers *The Jerk* and an auction of some of the historic seating to kick off the next upgrade campaign to improve the second hall in the theatre. “All you need is this seat ...” says Silverman with a giggle as she references Steve Martin’s character holding on to his worldly possessions during his demise in the movie.

Whether you support the arts, history and film or are just looking for a great time out with friends, the Belcourt satisfies. Great things await at this nonprofit venue. It truly is of, by and for the neighborhood, community and its generous membership. You’ll be thrilled with the programming, awed by the hospitality and touched if you look carefully about the building and see glimpses of history in the ornately carved border around the screen in the 1925 Hall.

*Information and show times can be found at [belcourt.org](http://belcourt.org)*