

## FEATURE ARTICLE ON THE MAUI ARTS & CULTURAL CENTER

Written by David Amack

**W**hat could possibly be more important than an idea? An idea can transform each of us by introducing a new concept, or by allowing us to look at something familiar in a new light. And in a very real sense ideas are what elevate mankind from survivor to creator, from destroyer to builder.

Ideas have the magical property of being contagious. A single idea can start a chain reaction, creating the excitement and energy to shape our individual lives and the destiny of our families, communities, nations, and indeed the world. It is the sharing of the idea that causes it to flower, giving rise to still other ideas each one filtered through the experience of its creator, and ready to be built upon.

On an island that enjoys such a rich diversity of ideas, it seems ironic that Maui has not created a forum dedicated to their exchange – a central meeting place for one to inspire and be inspired, to speak and be heard, to be captivated and surprised and filled with wonder. Until now.

Next year, the Maui Arts & Cultural Center will open its doors, an idea transformed into reality by the commitment and support of all factions of the community: state and county governments, corporations and small businesses, and the private sector.

Director Verne Stanford oversees all phases of The Center's development. With ground breaking just around the corner, he is already deeply involved in the development of programs that will enrich Maui.

Stanford stresses that the facility will work to reach all segments of the community. The programs, classes, and events offered will cut across the boundaries of age, education, and heritage. Encouragement will be financial as well as philosophical, with funding available for the presentation of new works, whatever the medium. "We are definitely going to take a grass roots approach to benefit the average person," says Stanford. "The Center will exist to serve Maui's art and culture."

How far does that commitment go? As far as Hana, if need be, or even Molokai or Lanai, to reach Maui County residents for when a visit to The Center would be difficult or impossible. In some cases, this will mean taking a performance or exhibit on the road, as it did with the recent performance in Hana of the New world Guitar Trio. Other times, it will involve transporting people to The Center. The ideas, Stanford insists, are for everyone.



## **LAYING THE GROUNDWORK**

Two years after The Center kicked off an unprecedented \$24 million fund-raising campaign, all necessary preparations had been made to begin work with the July ground breaking. Construction drawings are complete, and a construction management team has been assembled to oversee adherence to concepts, timetable, and quality of work. The actual construction is estimated to take from 18 to 27 months.

## **WHERE IT'S AT – AND WHY**

The Maui Community Arts & Cultural Center will be built in the new Maui Central Park in Kahului, on the site of the old Quonset huts along Kahului Beach Road. One major consideration was proximity to Maui Community College. MCC will be The Center's principal daytime occupants and will present its series of evening performances there. Also, plans to expand MCC's course offerings in areas such as instrumental music, drama, Hawaiian-style theater, and ethnic dance made easy access to The Center a priority.

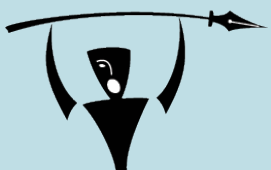
The site itself, however, presented a special problem for Honolulu architect John Hara. The architect's challenge was to design a facility that would allow outdoor activities in an area that can be very windy. Hara designed several configurations and conducted extensive wind-tunnel tests on each. The result is an L-shaped design that uses the main cluster of buildings to protect the courtyard areas from the wind.

## **AN OVERVIEW – WITH NOTHING OVERLOOKED**

The Center's board of directors hired the nation's top consultants in theater design, acoustics, architecture, and management. Participating consultants include Larry Kirkegaard, whose firm solved acoustical problems in Carnegie Hall and San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall; Joshua Dache, whose company Jules Fisher Associates, has won three Tony awards and is considered one of the top three theater consulting firms in the country; and Tom Klobe, director of the University of Hawaii's art gallery, whose exhibits have won the coveted Print Casebook's Best in Exhibition Design award. Their expertise has created an efficient, cost-effective design that combines state-of-the-art facilities with a respect for tradition.

Inspired by Hawaii's indoor/outdoor architecture, The Center will consist of a cluster of 13 buildings connected by gardens and covered walks that partly enclose a large, sheltered courtyard. The buildings include the main theater and lobby; the smaller, experimental type of theater often referred to as a *black box*; the exhibition gallery; and various support facilities: scene and costume shops, rehearsal areas, offices, and classrooms. Names of the various facilities, determined by major gifts to The Center, will be announced in an upcoming issue of this publication.

Because The Center will be used by a wide variety of groups, versatility was a major design consideration. To achieve maximum flexibility, many rooms will be equipped with partitions and sliding glass doors.



## **THE MAIN THEATER**

The Center's main theater incorporates an innovative blend of technology, utility, and aesthetics. The lobby will welcome the theatergoer with a soaring ceiling and high, windowed walls overlooking the ocean by day and the lights of the harbor at night.

The theater's three levels will provide flexible seating for 450 to 1,150. Even when the main theater is at full capacity, it is configured so that all seats will be relatively close to the stage, creating an intimate theater experience for everyone.

The main theater's size and technical superiority promise to attract many of the world's premier talents who have not performed on Maui because of the lack of proper facilities.

For the Maui Philharmonic Society, the theater means being able to contemplate a season of works such as the Grand Kabuki, the San Francisco Ballet, Lily Tomlin's one-woman show, concerts by jazz great Wynton Marsalis, and the Vienna Boys' Choir.

For the Maui Academy of Performing Arts (formerly Maui Youth Theater), which lost its home earlier this year, the main theater will provide an opportunity to bring together hundreds of school children for matinee shows that educate while they entertain. With programs like *The Hobbit*, *Romeo & Juliet*, Appalachian and Japanese folk tales, and Huluhia Hawaii (a script written for the Academy about people caught in a clash of cultures), a new generation of theatergoers will be inspired.

## **THE MINI THEATER**

The Center's mini-theater features seating that is entirely flexible, inviting innovation and creativity that most theaters simply cannot accommodate.

An acoustical guitarist might prefer cabaret seating to evoke the intimacy of a nightclub, while an improvisational group may use it to encourage audience interaction.

Seating in the round would be ideal for a hula exhibition, or for performance art – which combines different genres such as storytelling and dance. The Academy of Maui Community Theater can explore new horizons with productions in the round.

Because some recitals and dramatic productions require a more traditional arrangement, the mini-theater will be equipped with pull-out seating to comfortably handle 200 people.

With its 14-foot ceiling and overall flexibility, the mini-theater will be an ideal place to present avant-garde films, small art shows, and other productions that attract a specialized audience.



## **AUXILIARY BUILDINGS**

Complementing The Center's performing arts wing are two auxiliary buildings that will serve as headquarters for the Maui Community Theater and the Maui Academy of Performing Arts, both of which will permanently reside at The Center.

The Academy's building will house a scene shop and costume area, a rehearsal room, and two classrooms. The Maui Community Theater's building will have rehearsal space, as well as costume and scene shops. These facilities will allow for larger-scale productions that simply have not been possible before, such as *Cats*, *Les Miserables*, *Phantom of the Opera*, even *Starlight Express*.

The Center's mini- and main theaters will be supported by a rehearsal room and six dressing rooms that can convert to small rehearsal areas. Together they will provide desperately needed practice space for choral groups, high school drama classes, bands, and other community organizations. For years, the Maui Symphony Orchestra has had to perform its regular season without a permanent home. The Center's rehearsal rooms and secure storage for orchestral equipment will make possible an expanded schedule of popular, operatic, and classical concerts, and advance one of the primary purposes for which the symphony was founded: the training of young musicians.

## **THE GALLERY**

With over 4,100 square feet of floor space and a ceiling grid to enable variations of lighting and display, The Center's gallery can showcase virtually any exhibit. Movable floor-to-ceiling panels will also help to create an ambiance to match the needs of each exhibit. Secure and climate-controlled, the gallery will also house extensive storage and preparation areas.

An exhibition area of this caliber creates opportunities never before possible on Maui. For the first time, residents here will be able to share in the wealth that already tours Oahu – exhibits like the art of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, or the contemporary art of the American West, which have visited Honolulu over the past few years. What's more, by sharing shipping costs with Oahu, The Center will have the potential to bring in shows that up to now have been unaffordable on any single island.

Opportunities of another kind will be made possible by a classroom adjacent to the gallery. Equipped with sinks and other paraphernalia, it will offer an ideal Central Valley location for adult art classes, and for after-school and summer art programs for kids.



# Feature Article

## **THE CAFE**

Conveniently located between the main theater and gallery, the cafe will be a comfortable, relaxing place for the exchange of ideas. Its indoor/outdoor seating, scenic ocean and courtyard views, and an appealing menu will make the cafe a great spot to meet friends for lunch or *pau hana*, to enjoy pupus and a glass of wine before an event, or a late supper after the show.

## **THE COURTYARDS**

The center's three courtyards will invite a variety of outdoor activities. A sculpture courtyard, adjacent to the main theatre, will display works on loan. After a period of time, new pieces of sculpture will replace those returned to patrons or sold at auction by the gallery. The sculpture courtyard will be a unique setting for weddings and other ceremonies.

In front of the cafe, between the main theater lobby and the gallery, will be the founders' courtyard. Its location and size (approximately 3,300 square feet) make it the perfect reception area.

Largest of the three, the grand courtyard is a two-acre lawn that gently slopes down to an outdoor stage. The grand courtyard will be wired for lighting and sound, allowing for the production of concerts, crafts, fairs, and outdoor exhibits that can easily accommodate more than 2,000 people at a sitting.

## **AND THEN SOME**

The Maui Community Arts & Cultural Center will repay the people of Maui many times over. The children and their children will inherit a legacy from the many believers who cared enough to make a dream come true. And for those children, whether or not they realize it, the gift is more than buildings and courtyards. It is the opportunity to create their legacy for the generations yet to come. That gift, of course, is the whole idea.

