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Nonprofits & Philanthropy

Music Hall moves forward with new concert venue next to historic Detroit space

By Sherri Welch



Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts is moving forward with plans for a multi-story expansion next to its historic Detroit venue.

The organization has filed plans with the Detroit Historic District Commission for a 100,000-square-foot, five-story "performance center beacon" on the corner of Madison and Randolph streets on the current site of a parking lot, in the Madison-Harmonie historic district.

Music Hall purchased the parking lot at 300 Madison next to its building in March 2022 from Madison Randolph Associates LLC for \$4.6 million.



As envisioned, the new, permanent expansion will echo the existing Music Hall's stone and brick facade, with granite wall panels and glazed brick on the street-level facade, according to the plans filed with the Historic District Commission. It will also include a colorful screen on the second through fourth floors "to symbolize the rich and vibrant musical history of Detroit" and a pitched metal roof that will cantilever out over corner and rear rooftop terraces, new sidewalks and streetscaping. The architect on the plans is New York City-based Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architecture.

The project is set to go before the Historic District Commission next week.

Music Hall, which leased the lot before purchasing it last year, has erected a temporary stage and movable seating in the parking lot each summer since 2020 when it devised the idea to provide a space for live, open-air performances during the pandemic. It has continued to use it for that purpose each year, from May to September, before reverting it to parking each fall after the close of its season.

Last year, President and Artistic Director Vince Paul shared early plans with Crain's Detroit Business. At the time, [the expansion plan in development](#) included a new, contemporary concert venue with capacity for 1,900 people, recording studios, offices for agents and other music industry professionals and a music academy operated by the nonprofit.



Paul could not immediately be reached for comment on Tuesday morning.

Last year he said the expansion would mark the first new theater of size built in Detroit in decades. The new concert venue would expand the demographic Music Hall serves, he said, building on its mission of bringing different communities in Detroit together by presenting every conceivable genre, from Bollywood, contemporary ballet, hip hop and Broadway to Johnny Mathis and family theater.

Paul said at the time he expected Music Hall to launch a fundraising campaign in fall 2022 to support the undisclosed cost.

The historic venue opened its doors in 1928 for live performances after its founding by Matilda Dodge Wilson originally as the Wilson Theatre. It hosted renowned musicians


including Count Basie, Sarah Vaughan and Billie Holiday before shifting for a time to a movie theater, [Paul told Crain's when he joined Music Hall in 2007](#).

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra moved into the Art Deco venue in 1946, changing its name to Detroit Music Hall. Michigan Opera Theatre (now Detroit Opera) also called the building home from 1971-1985, according to the Detroit Historical Society. The building dodged the wrecking ball in 1974, completing a comprehensive renovation in 1995 with support from Detroit Renaissance (which evolved into Business Leaders of Michigan), the Kresge Foundation and the Music Hall Board of Trustees.

Music Hall then returned to its performing arts roots in dance, theater and music, with a focus on jazz, and educational programs, operating as Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts.

By **Sherri Welch**

Sherri Welch is a senior reporter for Crain's Detroit Business covering nonprofits, philanthropy, higher education and arts and culture. Before joining Crain's in 2003, she covered automotive suppliers and tire makers for Crain's Rubber & Plastics News.

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