

A Letter From Gary Meyer

*Reprinted from the February 9, 2012 CinemaSF (<http://www.cinemasf.com/>)
Newsletter*

Dear Friends,

It has been exactly ten years since I agreed to take over the Balboa Theatre. Built by Samuel Levin in 1926 as a part of his group of neighborhood cinemas, it was designed by the Reid Brothers, architects responsible for many theaters, the Cliff House, Hotel Del Coronado and more. In December 2000, Irma Levin, then in her late 80s, called to inform me that the family was considering closing the Balboa because it had become too tough for them, with one theater, to compete in the marketplace dominated by multiplexes and national circuits taking control.

As part of my first job in the theater business I booked the Balboa from 1972-76 and got to know Irma and her late husband Irving. They had founded the San Francisco International Film Festival, the first in the Americas and loved the movies.

At the time the Balboa was a second run theater, as it had been since it opened. The programming was pretty erratic with double bills of whatever films were available and they were often bad ones. Spending time at the Balboa that month I got to know the loyal attendees and asked others if they had ever been to the theater. For me, having programmed many repertory cinemas, I was intrigued by the possibilities of what we could show.

In January, 2001 I took over. With an enthusiastic staff led by General Manager Roger Paul we made a commitment to showing quality movies, offering excellent customer service, creating an informative website and a weekly newsletter. We set out to build an audience and sense of community. Prices would be among the lowest in town both at the box office and concession stand while upgrading the experience for audiences. We would have filmmaker and author visits, special events, contests and fun. Roger set out to make the best popcorn in town (audiences agree that he succeeded). We offered fine coffee and a concession selection of both popular favorites and specialty items.

Patron comments guided theater policies and attendance grew. But the shifting marketplace meant our programming had to shift more to first run movies with plenty of special events.

The work involved in operating independent cinemas takes a commitment of time, energy and fresh ideas. It has become increasingly difficult for me to do my best contributing these things while doing my full time job as Co-Director of the Telluride Film Festival.

A few months ago I was approached by an enthusiastic San Francisco couple who loved the Balboa and wanted to know if I would be interested in selling or taking on

a partner. After spending time with them it was clear that they had the passion required. Adam has business experience running and marketing a restaurant and producing many music events each year. Jaimi has an accounting background and currently is a production designer for movies and television. And they both have high energy and creative ideas.

The San Francisco Neighborhood Theatre Foundation, an all-volunteer organization, had purchased the Vogue (a sister theater also built by the Levins) four years ago and had the same issues I did.

Together we proposed that this couple should take over both the Balboa and the Vogue. With Roger Paul staying on as General Manager there would be an economy of scale in staffing, buying supplies and increased flexibility for booking movies. The theaters could more effectively cross-promote and offer audiences more options.

There was concern that I would no longer be choosing movies but there was a perfect solution. Jan Klingelhofer, who worked alongside me at Landmark for thirteen years, has built a most trusted film booking service for independent theater owners and really knows and loves movies. I will be in the background consulting and contributing. You will see me at the Balboa Birthday Bash on March 4. I have great confidence that the future looks terrific.

It is now time for me to introduce you to Adam Bergeron and Jaimi Holker. I know that you will welcome them and quickly come to know how lucky San Franciscans are to have them carrying on the traditions of the Vogue and Balboa while bringing new ideas and amenities to movie lovers.

Thanks to all of you for your loyalty, generosity and kindnesses. The Balboa staff has been dedicated to creating a terrific experience for you and I cannot begin to express my appreciation to them.

I look forward to seeing many of you but this time I will be with you in the audience.

Sincerely,

Gary Meyer

A Letter From Adam & Jaimi

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Hello everybody,

A few months ago my wife and I went to a movie at the Balboa and said, "Boy, this sure is a beautiful old theater. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be a part of it?" A few weeks later I attended an open house at the Balboa and learned that Gary Meyer and the San Francisco Neighborhood Theater Foundation were partnering to establish a long-term plan to save the Balboa and combine its operations with Vogue Theatre. One thing led to another, and here we are writing our first newsletter to you as the new operators of the Balboa and the Vogue Theatres. We are long-time San Francisco residents, dyed-in-the-wool movie buffs, and dedicated to sustaining these two wonderful historic venues. Gary Meyer will be working closely with us as a consultant, and the SFNTF will remain actively involved as our partners and landlords at both theatres. They'll also continue their important work to upgrade both theatres.

We will strive to provide you with movies and events you will love in an authentic and charming setting, and we may even have a few tricks up our sleeve as time goes on. We've created a new website for both theaters which will operate under a new entity called Cinema SF. We've even introduced credit cards to the Balboa! We look forward to meeting you some day soon, and would love to hear any comments or suggestions you may have.

Sincerely,
Adam Bergeron & Jaimi Holker

Reach out. Take a chance. Get hurt even. Play as well as ya can. Go team, go! Give me an L. Give me an I. Give me a V. Give me an E. L-I-V-E. LIVE! Otherwise, you got nothin' to talk about in the locker room." - Harold and Maude (1971)