

The Civic opened in 1929 as a picture palace, a truly glamorous experience for patrons attending the ‘talkies’.

Today, The Civic is one of the few remaining intact atmospheric theatres in the world, and is widely regarded as one of Auckland’s architectural treasures and a favourite place to visit for live entertainment and film.

“With supreme confidence in the future of Auckland, and with gratitude to those who have toiled with me in this great endeavour, I present to my fellow citizens the consummation of an ideal – the creating of a place of entertainment symbolising the progressive spirit of our beautiful city.”

Thomas O’Brien
CREATOR, THE CIVIC



The Early Days

The Civic was built in just eight months as an atmospheric cinema, and is one of the finest examples worldwide. It is scheduled as a Category A historic building.

Enterprising entrepreneur Thomas O’Brien secured the lease of the land and commissioned the design of a new building that would be the “largest in the Dominion (with) equipment and furnishings modelled on the latest practice abroad provided upon an exceedingly lavish scale.” The project is estimated to have cost £200,000.

O’Brien choose an Eastern theme, with Indian-inspired motifs in the public foyer including seated Buddhas, twisted columns and domed ceilings. The main auditorium features Spanish courtyard turrets, minarets, spires, tiled roofs, Abyssinian panther statues and a soft-top ceiling which gives the effect of a domed blue sky with twinkling stars and floating clouds.

The opening of The Civic coincided with the Great Depression and within two years it was in severe financial difficulties. Williamson Films Ltd took over the house management and a bankrupted Thomas O’Brien fled to Australia, and never resurfaced in theatre again.



Fever of the Fleet

The Civic cinema and cabaret were especially popular during World War II and so, for an entire generation of Aucklanders, servicemen and women, The Civic was closely associated with relief from the anxieties of war.

The most famous of The Civic personalities was Freda Stark, who won notoriety by dancing wearing only a headpiece, a G-string and covering of gold paint! There are a number of scandals and rumours around Freda and her lovers, which included her being a key witness in a murder trial.

In her heyday, Freda was nicknamed ‘Fever of the Fleet’ because of her popularity with the American servicemen.



Film History

In the 1960s, *The Sound of Music* ran for 18 months and another long-running movie was *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

In 1997, at the premiere of Rowan Atkinson’s movie *Bean* there were three Minis parked in the foyer.

For Peter Jackson’s 2005 movie, *King Kong*, The Civic was one of the only non-computer generated parts of the set. It doubled as the Alhambra Theatre on Broadway, New York City, where the chained Kong is revealed to the audience, gets stage fright, and smashes up the place.

“The irony is that we were so careful with The Civic. Obviously it’s a place that is very precious and we were careful not to scratch it or do anything to damage it. ...All the time I was thinking, I can’t wait to see when Kong just trashes the place!”

Peter Jackson
DIRECTOR

Each year in July, The Civic becomes an iconic destination for the New Zealand International Film Festival.

Restoration

The stars in The Civic auditorium’s famous night sky, which was created with tiny lightbulbs in 1929 (imagine having the job of changing the lightbulbs!) are now 1,000 purpose-designed fibre optic lightheads. If you look up when the night sky sequence is on, you’ll see the Auckland sky as it appears on 20 April at 10pm every year.

The flamingo curtain – used for special occasions – is a lovingly embroidered recreation of the 1929 original, crafted from a 2,000-piece pattern by an army of specialists during the refurbishment of the theatre.

After a tumultuous history and the threat of demolition, The Civic reopened on its 70th birthday, 20 December 1999, following a comprehensive two year restoration which included the addition of the stage and backstage areas. Now it is the home of musicals as well as hosting theatre, concerts and many other events.

Notable Visitors

Over the years The Civic has been visited by many celebrities, including Bette Davis, Charlton Heston, Bob Hope, Eleanor Roosevelt, Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery Joan Collins, Julie Andrews and the Dalai Lama to name a few.

The Civic has been a popular music venue with shows by international acts such as Nick Cave, Elvis Costello, Jethro Tull, Erykah Badu, Sufjan Stevens and many more. What many don’t know, is that The Rolling Stones played two shows at The Civic on 1 March 1966, the nine song set concluding with *(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction*.

A star-studded roster of New Zealand actors have also graced The Civic stage including Michael Hurst, Morgana O’Reilly, Antony Starr, Ian Mune, Lucy Lawless, Rhys Darby and Sam Neill. Local musicians have included Don McGlashan, Hollie Smith, Bic Runga, Brooke Fraser and Stan Walker.

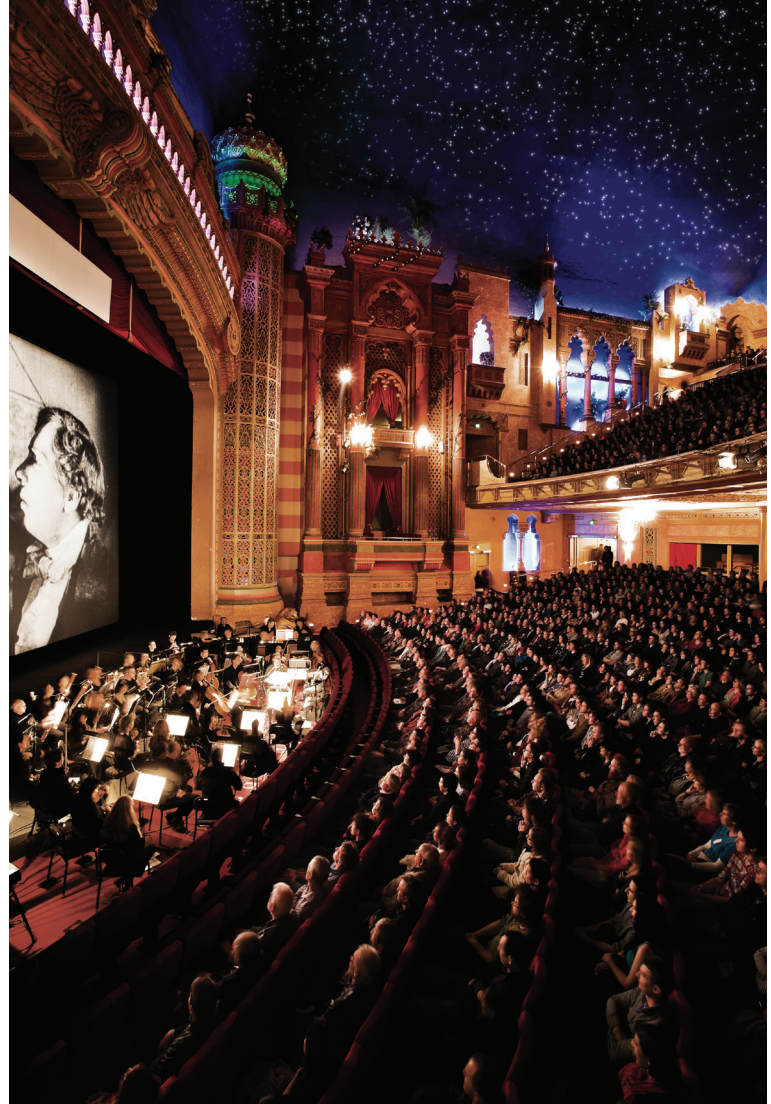
Some of the world’s major award-winning musicals have had seasons at The Civic including *Jersey Boys*, *Mary Poppins*, *WICKED*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *CATS* and *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*. Audiences have flocked to also experience *Nederlands Dans Theater*, *The Illusionists*, the *Royal New Zealand Ballet* and many local and international live productions.

The Civic





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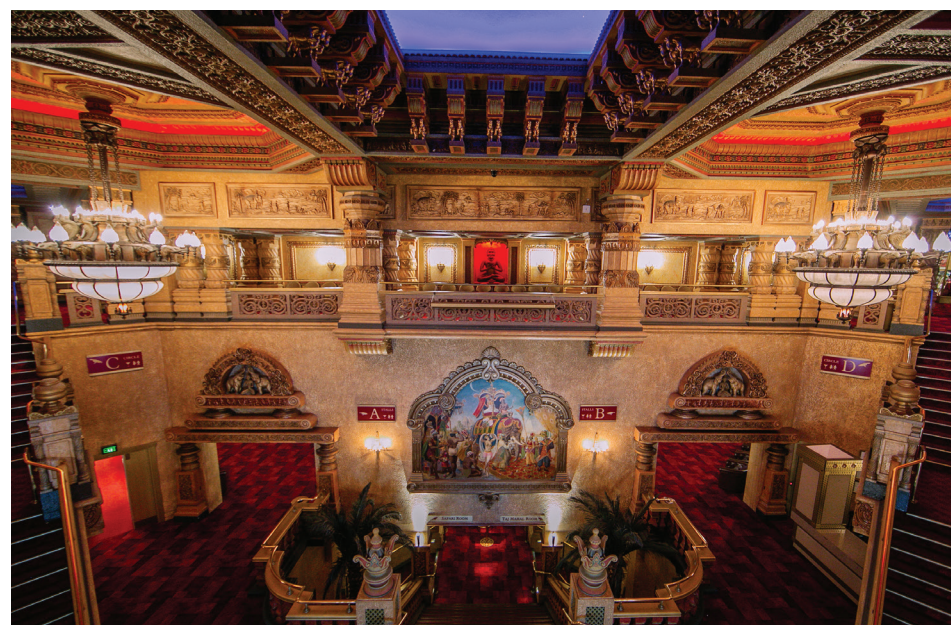
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- 01 Jean Kim (2016)
Abyssinian Panther
The Civic
- 02 Unknown (2011)
Nosferatu, a Symphony of Horrors
New Zealand International Film Festival
with Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra
- 03 Unknown (1946)
Navy Blues
- 04 Sacha Stejko (2016)
The Civic Buddha
- 05 Sacha Stejko (2016)
The Civic Foyer



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