

ACADEMY OF MUSIC THEATRE • 524 MAIN STREET

Chip off the old block

GRAPHIC BY JON NESS • THE NEWS & ADVANCE

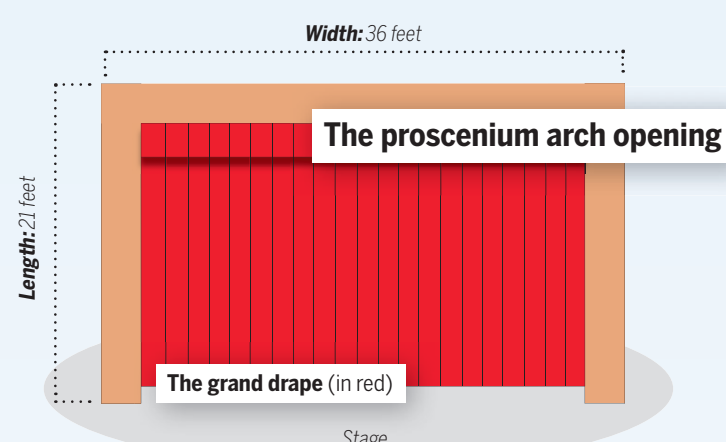
The Academy of Music Theatre reopened its doors late last year after more than 60 years. The restored historic theater was designed to be a replica of the 1912 facility with modern enhancements. Here is a look at some of the new features, including details about the new lobby next door:

\$30 million

» **Approximate total value** of the Academy of Music Theatre project, according to the Academy Center of the Arts. Two components — \$20 million for restoration and \$2.2 million for stabilization — were completed by Jamerson-Lewis Construction. An additional \$8 million was spent on design and consulting fees, fly tower work and items such as furniture and equipment.

2.5 years

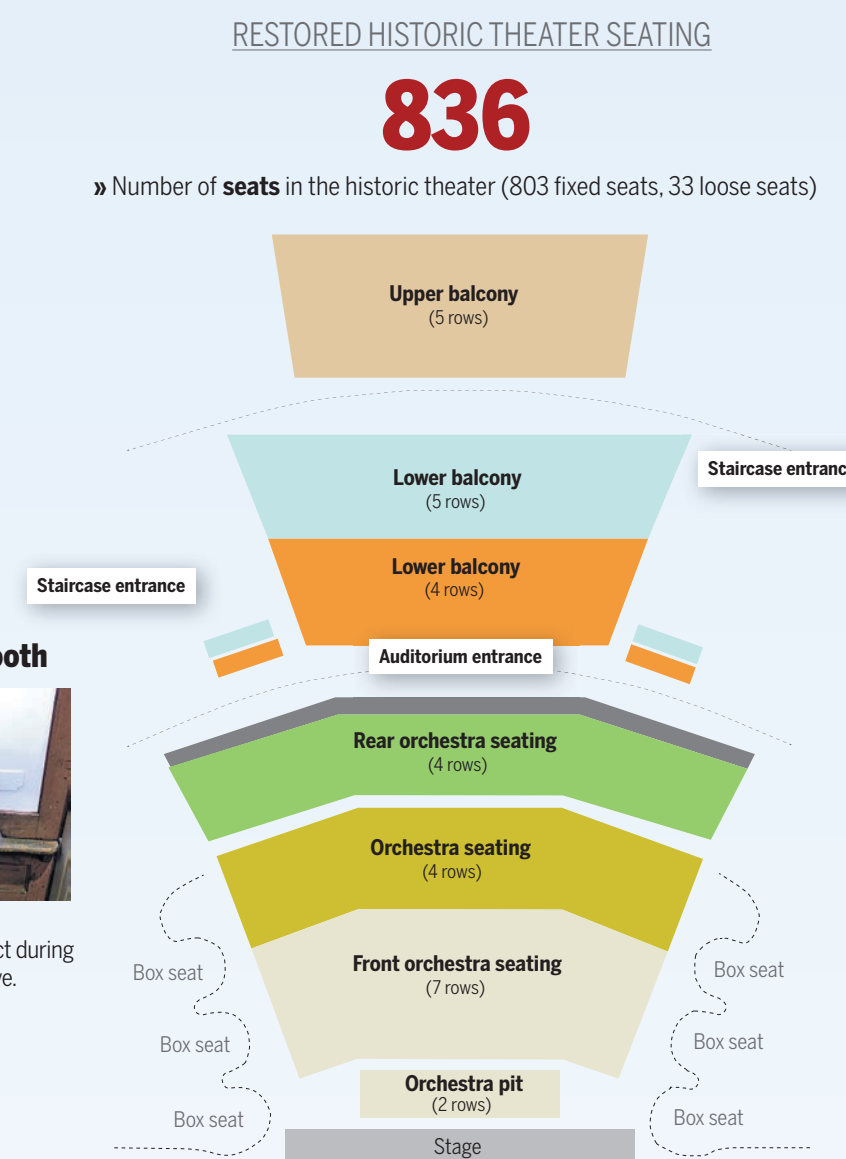
» Time it took to **complete the construction project**, according to the Academy. The stabilization project started in 2015, and the grand opening took place in 2018.



Plaster pieces
» The restored **Greek muses** in the historic theater can be seen above the box seats, and the **lion motifs** are on the façade and around the proscenium arch. The plaster pieces were restored by New York-based EverGreene Architectural Arts, according to the Academy.

Color scheme
» The theater's pink hue was replaced with a "peach ochre gold color," which analysts said was the color hidden under the pink for decades. EverGreene Architectural Arts helped perform the analysis using actual samples and scrapings, according to the Academy.

Former segregated ticket booth
» When the theater closed in the late 1950s, black patrons were still entering through a separate door, purchasing tickets from a separate ticket booth and sitting in a segregated balcony. The **former ticket booth**, located in the upper balcony, stayed intact during the theater renovation and is shown above.



Mezzanine floor in new lobby
» In between the upper and lower lobbies is the **mezzanine lobby**, which includes chairs with tables and a view of 5th Street through a large window (not pictured).

Wood from gutted theater used in new lobby
» **Reclaimed wood** from the gutted theater was incorporated into various parts of the new lobby's design, including on the steps, the ticket booth, the main bar, and the elevator shaft, which includes the area where the donor wall is placed.

Upper level of new lobby
» A flight of stairs up from the mezzanine lobby is the **upper lobby**, which includes more chairs, tables and a spacious area to walk around. Restrooms are located on this level as well.

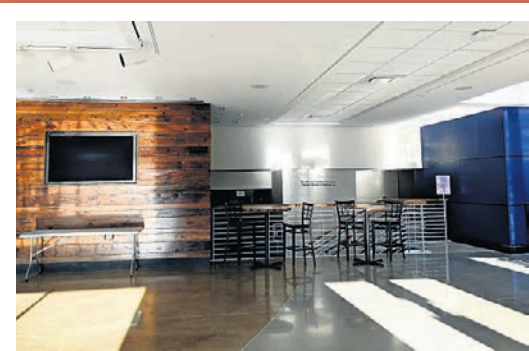
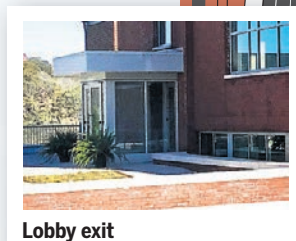
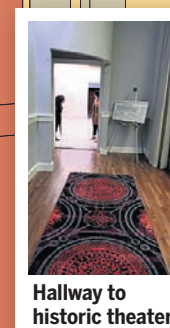
Box office

Historic brick
» The **brick** on the east side of the new lobby is from the original 1905 building, according to the Academy.

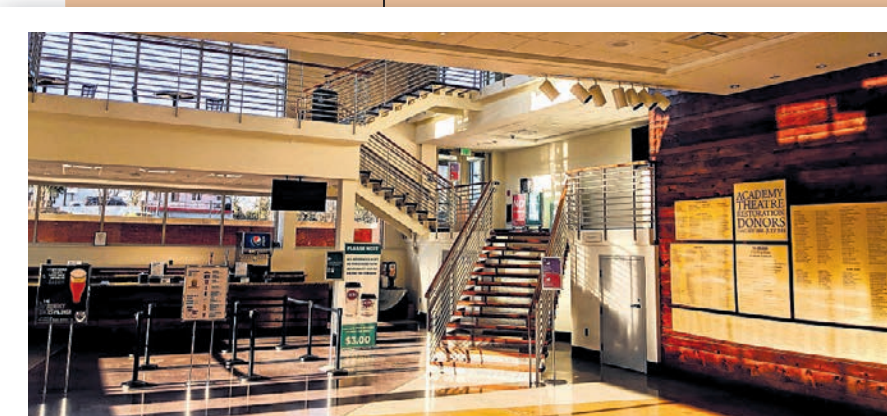
Lower lobby entrance to historic theater

Size of historic theater and new lobby combined: 52,000 square feet

Seating
» The theater **seats** were enlarged from their 1912 counterparts, and padding was added for additional comfort.



Concessions and seating area

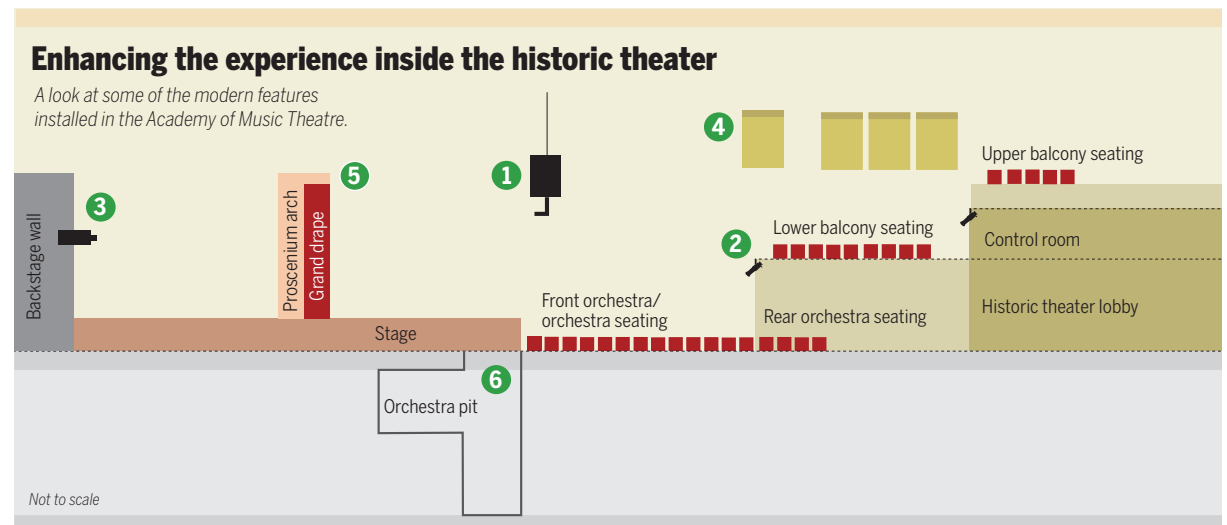


Lower level of new lobby
» People can enter the **lower level** of the **new lobby** through the main entrance door facing Main Street. The lobby includes a box office, concessions with a bar and seating. Plaques acknowledging donors also hang on the wall.

Displaying different colors
» The Academy has five areas that can be controlled to **display different colors**. The medallion on the ceiling of the theater (right), the ceiling at orchestra level, and three places in the theater's historic lobby.



Size of the historic theater stage
» The usable performance stage is about **3,200 square feet** (82 feet wide x 39 feet deep), according to the Academy. That is nearly 750 square feet more than the median size of a new single-family home sold in 2017 (2,457 square feet).



1 SOUND
» The Academy's new **all-digital sound system** features a line array speaker system directly over the front of the stage, medium speakers moving vertically on the sides of the proscenium arch and smaller delay speakers in various places around the theater so everyone experiences the same quality of sound no matter where they sit.



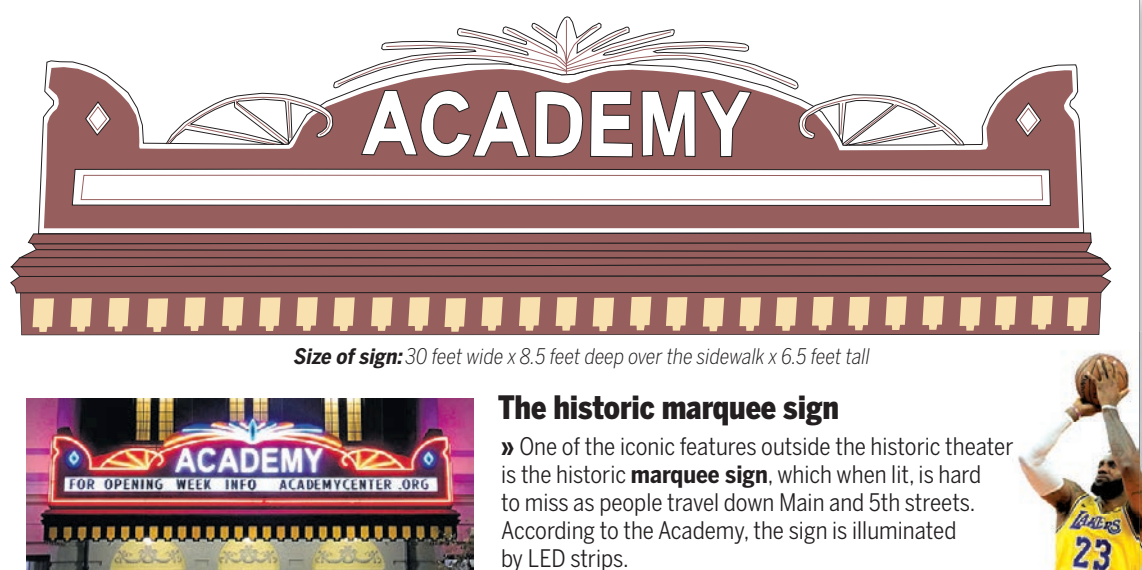
2 LIGHTS
» The Academy's new **lighting system**, which is comprised of more than 200 fixtures placed in various places around the theater, is LED-based, meaning it is more cost effective and space saving, as well as more efficient from a design standpoint. Older incandescent fixtures required special gel inserts to project a certain color, but the inserts limited lighting to one specific color per fixture. The new system is controlled from a lighting console, so designers can use as many colors as they want and change them as often as they want during a production.

3 REAR PROJECTOR
» The **rear projector** on the stage wall allows the Academy to create and use digital backgrounds instead of painted backdrops.

4 REDUCING THEATER NOISE
» The theater has **14 motorized acoustic banners** placed around the theater that can reduce reverberations in the room.

5 RIGGING
» The Academy's **rigging system** allows for scenery and curtains to be completely hidden above the stage before they drop down. The theater's **fly tower**, which was rebuilt in 2008, is 78 feet from roof to stage and set pieces are lifted to about 65 feet.

6 ORCHESTRA PIT COMPONENTS
» The theater's **orchestra pit** has two components: a stationary section directly under the stage that houses the orchestra and an elevator section that moves up and down. The elevator can stop at four different levels, including the audience level, where it can be used for additional seating, and stage level, where it can be used as an extension of the stage.



Top to bottom: How high is the historic theater?
» The **distance** from the last row of the **upper balcony** to **stage level** is **41 vertical feet**, according to the Academy. To put it into perspective, if stacked upon one another, one of the starting lineups for the Los Angeles Lakers is about 34 feet (Lebron James, 6'8"; Kyle Kuzma, 6'9"; Lonzo Ball, 6'6"; Brandon Ingram, 6'9" and JaVale McGee, 7'0"). Another player of McGee's height would be needed to reach the top of the balcony.



Art Deco chandeliers
» Lightsmith, a Lynchburg-based company, restored the **two chandeliers** hanging in the new lobby, according to the Academy. They originally hung in front of the proscenium arch in 1934 when the theater was a movie palace. Lightsmith also restored the vertical Academy sign hanging outside the new lobby.



Sources:
Academy Center of the Arts, academycenter.org;
Amanda Adams, architect at CDMV Architects; staff reports, U.S. Census Bureau
Academy photos by:
Emma Schloewen and Jon Ness, The News & Advance

BOOKS BY BLACK AUTHORS ABOUT BLACK CHARACTERS

» LIFESTYLE, D1

NASCAR CUP SERIES PREVIEW

» SPORTS, B4

WINE AND BABY GOATS

PAIRING A WINE TASTING WITH A 'SNUGGLE SESSION'

» LOCAL & STATE, C1



The News & Advance

na NEWSADVANCE.COM

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2019

Vol. 154, No. 48, Our 153rd Year • Lynchburg, Va.

HISTORY MEETS HIGH TECH

Newly restored circa-1912 Academy theater has state-of-the-art sound and scenic technology



TAYLOR IRBY/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

An actress sits on a flown-in set piece during a performance of "The Will Rogers Follies" at the Academy of Music Theatre on Feb. 9. The Academy's rigging system allows for scenery and curtains to be completely hidden above the stage before being dropped down to appear onstage, as if by magic.

By Emma Schkloven
eschkloven@newsadvance.com

Music floats up from a live orchestra below the Academy of Music Theatre stage, as a stagehand waits in the wings, his hands wrapped around a white cable.

With a glance toward the ceiling, he pulls and, like magic, the weights in front of him move skyward as a large, two-dimensional moon descends onto the stage.

The moment of theatrical illusion during a mid-February production of Alluvion Stage Company's "Will Rogers Follies," is one of many the newly restored Academy is able to create.

While much of the attention given to the theater reopening has focused on its 1912-inspired aesthetic, making it suitable for 21st century audiences also was a key focus, and involved outfitting the space with technology that can produce the kind of spectacle modern viewers have come to expect. This equipment includes everything from sound-dampening panels to an orchestra pit



EMMA SCHKLOVEN/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Kristin Lindquist attaches a mic to Emily Emanuel before a performance at the Academy of Music Theatre. The theater's all-digital sound system features speakers of varying sizes, a digital console and channels for wireless mics.

that can move almost two stories. "It allows us to make sure we can house a wide range of activity and be able to provide Lynchburg with as much as possible," said Geoffrey Kershner, executive director of the

Academy Center of the Arts, which renewed operations in December. "If we limited the technology and didn't get things up to date, there would

SEE TECH | A6

Emergency declaration faces fights in the court

President Trump's signature sets in motion a quick march to the courthouse

By Mark Sherman
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Let the lawsuits begin. President Donald Trump declared a national emergency along the southern border and predicted his administration would end up defending it all the way to the Supreme Court.

That might have been the only thing Trump said Friday that produced near-universal agreement.

The American Civil Liberties Union announced its intention to sue less than an hour after the White House released the text of Trump's declaration that the "current situation at the southern border presents a border security and humanitarian crisis that threatens core national security interests and constitutes a national emergency."

Nonprofit watchdog group Public Citizen filed suit later, urging the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to "bar Trump and the U.S. Department of Defense from using the declaration and funds appropriated for other purposes to build a border wall."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and several Democratic state attorneys general already have said they might go to court.

SEE COURT | A3

Petition started to memorialize fallen trooper

Effort underway to name bridge in honor of Dowell

By Justin Faulconer
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com

An effort is underway to name a bridge in Amherst in honor of Lucas B. Dowell, a Virginia State Police trooper who died Feb. 4 in the line of duty in Cumberland County.

Steve Martin, owner of Martin's Body and Paint Shop in Amherst, started a petition to memorialize Dowell, who patrolled Amherst County with state police's Area 20 office, by dedicating the bridge over the U.S. 29 Bypass at the Ambriar exit into the town of Amherst.

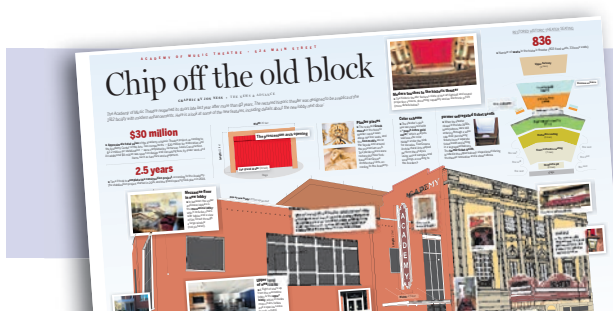


Dowell

"The response is overwhelming," Martin said of many residents who have signed so far. "It's the least we can do."

Dowell, a native of Chilhowie and 2009 graduate of Chilhowie High School, died at

SEE TROOPER | A3



INSIDE

» A closer look at some of the Academy of Music Theatre's new features, including details about the new lobby next door. A4-5

Rain and drizzle 37° 34°
Weather, A14

Abby.....D5 Lifestyle.....D1 Opinion.....A12
Books.....D2 Local & State.....C1 Politics.....A9
Classifieds.....E1 Lottery.....A2 Scoreboard.....B2
Crossword.....D5 Obituaries.....C2 Sports.....B1

na Online: newsadvance.com
Facebook: /newsadvance
Twitter: @newsadvance

\$2 DAILY \$3 SUNDAY
Miss a paper? Call (434) 385-5440
7 65161 50150

Tech

From Page A1

be a lot of performance activity we couldn't house here."

Setting the stage

When the Academy of Music Theatre opened its doors in 1905, like most theaters of the time, it relied on traditional wing and drop scenery to create an atmosphere onstage.

Following this standard theater practice, painted backdrops were brought in from the sides, or wings, of the stage and dropped, or flown, in from above using a rigging system, said theater historian Bill Kershner, father of Geoffrey Kershner.

Backdrops were tucked away in the fly tower until they appeared onstage, keeping them completely hidden from the audience. This technique allowed for sets to seemingly change from out of nowhere.

Today's Academy utilizes a similar approach, where set pieces can be dropped from the tower — the upper part of the stage house, which extends more than seven stories above the stage. Unlike the original counterweight system, the modern one uses steel weights to balance out whatever is hanging from the beam overhead instead of the sandbags Bill Kershner said theaters used in the 1900s.

Overall, the rigging can safely hold about 50,000 pounds of weight — or a little more than a fully loaded Greyhound bus — over the stage, said Tyler Herron, technical director of the Academy Center of the Arts.

The theater's scenic production tools also include a rear projector that helps create a mood onstage through the projection of digital backdrops "that move and shift as video does" and can be used instead of paying for expensive, hand-painted backdrops, Geoffrey Kershner said.

"You can make it snow or have a sunrise occur. It is a more active and dynamic scenic element," he added.

The theater does have a more traditional front projector for film screenings, but using the rear projector means the image being cast never covers the action onstage.

The projections and rigging objects can be used in combination to create a more dynamic picture onstage.

During a New York City scene in a December production of "Elf the Musical, Jr.," the team projected an image of the city's iconic skyline "and flew in some additional signs and scenery to make the New York scene feel more crowded and have more depth," Herron said. "It really helped add to the look on the stage."

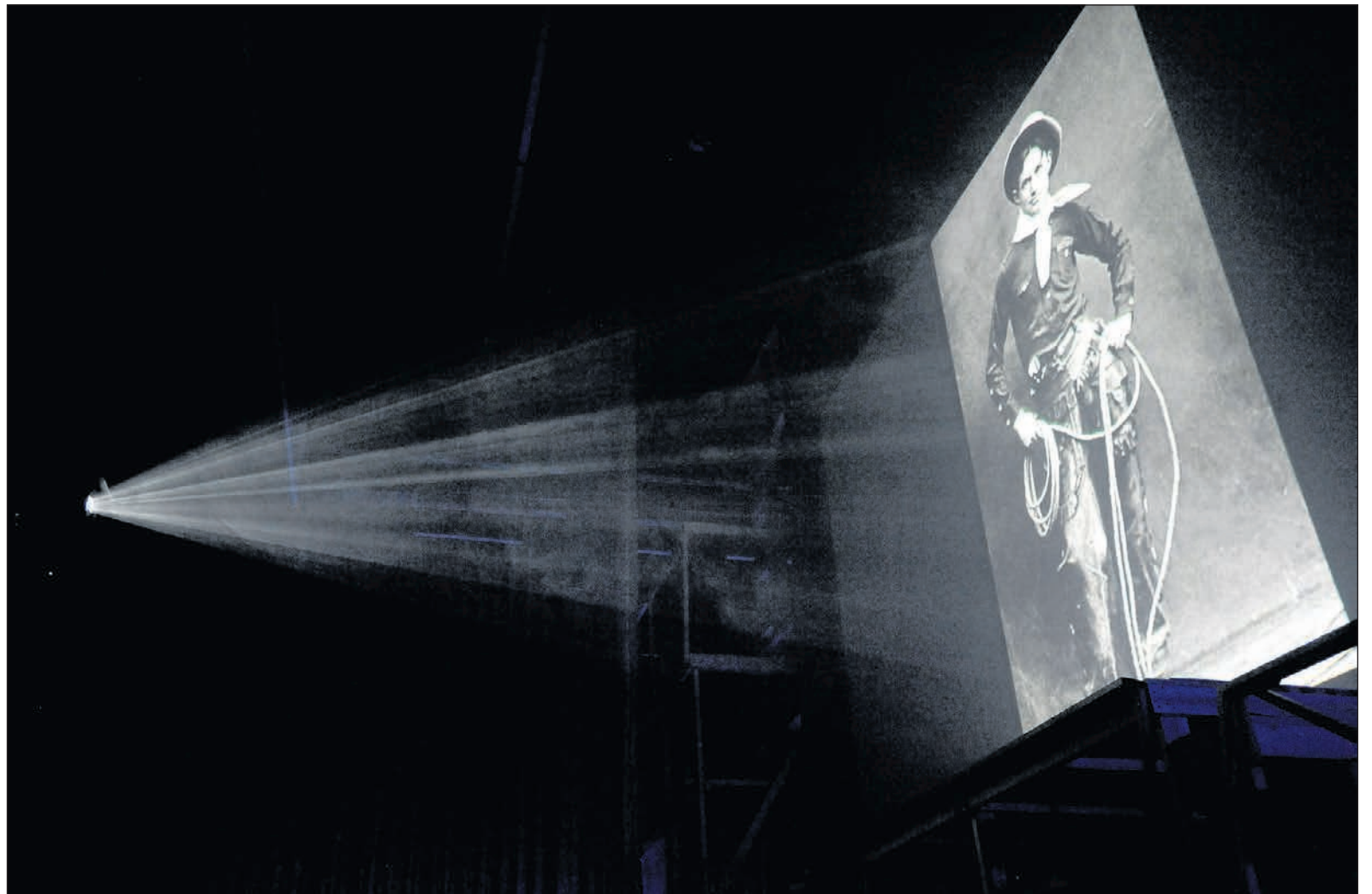
Rise up

By far the most talked-about element of the restored Academy is its orchestra pit. Although the historic theater also had a pit beneath the stage, the original would have been only about five feet down, Bill Kershner said.

"The performers needed to be able to see the conductor. Now, you can put monitors and a camera on the conductor, but back then you couldn't be so far down that your arms were below stage level."

Not only is the downtown theater's new pit lower, it also moves.

The pit has two components, said Amanda Adams, architect with the Lynchburg branch of CJMW Architecture, which



A projector against the back wall of the stage projects an image of Will Rogers for a performance of "The Will Rogers Follies" at the Academy Theatre on Feb. 9. The projector's placement on the back wall of the stage allows for the projection of digital backdrops.



Members of the band perform in the orchestra pit during a performance at the theater. The pit lift features two parts, a stationary portion directly under the stage and an elevator that can be raised to various levels, including pit level where it creates a larger space for the musicians.

worked on the Academy restoration project.

The first is the stationary pit, located directly under the stage that houses the musicians. The other is a vertically moving platform, called the orchestra pit lift.

While the pit lift is the theater's most expensive single-item system, costing about \$250,000, having it increases the flexibility of the space, Adams said.

The lift, which starts at the storage level 18-feet below the stage, can raise to pit level to create a larger space for the musicians; orchestra level, where it can be used for additional audience seating; and stage level, to act as an extension of the stage.

Being able to go from stage to storage level in

a matter of minutes also makes moving equipment, sets and other production elements easier.

"We can have a performance in the theater one night, change it over that same night and be able to load the next show in the next day," Geoffrey Kershner said.

Hit the lights

By the time the Academy opened at the turn of the century, the theater world had embraced one of the most cutting-edge pieces of technology: electricity. Production crews in the old theater would have controlled the lights using a large dimmer system.

"They would have a literal bank of dimmers with big handles on them,"

Bill Kershner said. "They would be given the cue by the stage manager and for a particular cue, different levers would [be moved] to different levels."

Currently, the Academy's other performance space, the Warehouse Theatre, uses two six-foot-tall dimmer units, which take up their own room, Herron said.

For a space the size of the Academy of Music Theatre, Herron estimates three or four units would have been needed.

Instead, the entire building, including the new lobby, is LED-operated, making the building not only more cost effective and environmentally friendly but space saving and design efficient.

Rather than using the common practice of covering lights with color filters, called gels, which lock the production into a limited color palette, the Academy's lights are programmed through a computer.

This system lets designers use as many colors as they can imagine and seamlessly change them during a production, Herron said.

"The show can be programmed very, very specifically and it's going to be the exact same thing every day," he said. "You don't have to rely on somebody hitting that mark, hitting that right level."

Hear me, hear me

Even in the 20th century, the Academy was known

for its stellar acoustics.

The theater's new, all-digital sound system — which features speakers of varying sizes placed throughout the space, as well as a digital console and channels for wireless mics — is meant to enhance the natural acoustic properties of the space.

"The idea was in designing this sound system that every seat in the house gets the same quality of sound," Herron said.

But some of the Academy's most interesting technology actually is used to minimize sound inside the historic theater. There are 14 motorized acoustic banners dotted around the space that can reduce reverberations in the room.

"When the banners are up, the room is a little more live for things like choral music, symphonies," said Timothy Echols, the Academy's director of concert production. "When you deploy the banners and they're down, they tend to absorb more sound, and it makes the room a little calmer."

Lifting the banners up brings the acoustics of the theater more in tune with what they were in 1905, the production team said.

The sound amplification and noise reduction technology only work as well as they do because the Academy had great bones for bouncing sound, Echols added.

"If you have a bad sounding room, you could put a million-dollar system in it and it's not going to do any good."

Putting it together

Fog rolls across Alluvion's set earlier this month, as images of suspension bridges and starry nights flash behind the actors onstage.

Lights flicker from a warm magenta to cool teal blue as a backdrop of sand and palm trees drops from the ceiling.

Just out of the audience's sightline, the orchestra plays on.

All of the Academy's modern enhancements come together to create a space that can house everything from a speaking engagement to a rock concert.

The technology is "just a tool that allows whatever's being done onstage to shine," Herron said. "If it's all going correctly, nobody even knows that it's there."

Emma Schkloven covers arts and entertainment for The News & Advance. Reach her at (434) 385-5489.



An actor prepares to swing onto the stage using a rigged rope during a performance of "The Will Rogers Follies." Overall, the rigging safely can hold about 50,000 pounds of weight — or a little more than a fully loaded Greyhound bus — over the stage.