

## Westwood's Crest Theatre reopens as the Nimoy, CAP UCLA's ambitious new performance space



CAP UCLA co-interim directors Fred Frumberg, left, and Meryl Friedman stand with new artistic director Edgar Miramontes in front of the UCLA Nimoy Theater, formerly the Crest Theatre, in Westwood. (Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times)

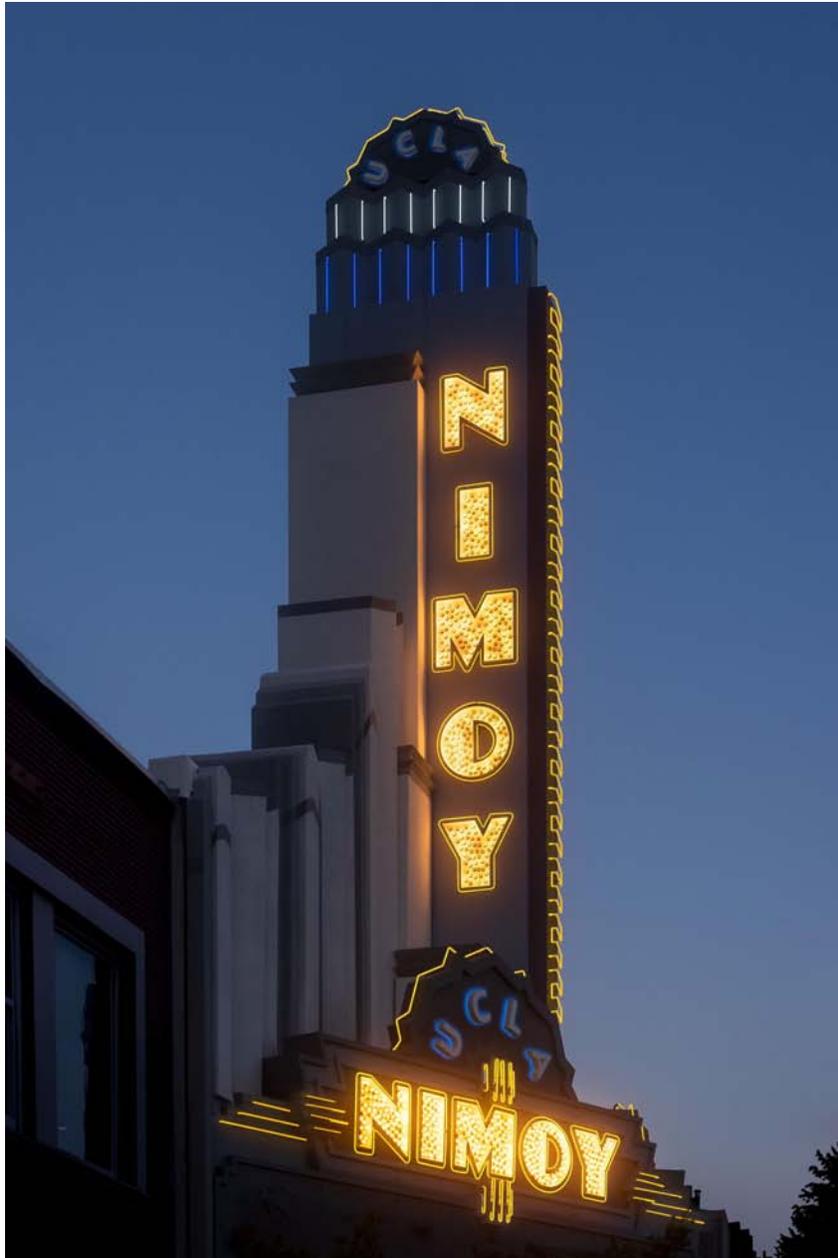
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In 1987, the hit comedy [“Three Men and a Baby”](#) premiered at the Art Deco Crest Theatre in Westwood. The film was directed by [Leonard Nimoy](#), and it became the highest-grossing movie of that year — raking in more than \$167 million.

The film was a massive professional success for the “Star Trek” star, and the Crest has since retained a special importance to the Nimoy family, says [Nimoy’s widow, Susan](#). Decades later,

when UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance asked for a donation so the university could purchase the shuttered theater, Susan realized it presented a unique opportunity.

In September, the Crest will reopen as the UCLA Nimoy Theater and will be used as a home base for CAP UCLA's eclectic, interdisciplinary performing arts programming. Those behind the 300-seat venue hope it will soon become a crucial part of L.A.'s vibrant — although still pandemic-challenged — live arts landscape.



The marquee for the UCLA Nimoy Theater. (Misha Gravenor)

“Leonard was very much in touch with his good fortune,” says Susan during a recent phone conversation. “He often spoke about wanting to give back and wanting to make an impact.”

As an actor, Susan says, Leonard was incredibly invested in the stage. It was almost as if he did film and television just so he could spend six months or a year doing a play, she added. His love of live performance, and his dedication to social justice, Susan says, aligns with CAP UCLA’s mission to present work by eclectic artists representing a diversity of voices and ideas in theater, music, dance and literature as well as digital media and other novel formats.

CAP UCLA’s co-interim directors, Fred Frumberg and Meryl Friedman, have played a pivotal role in the extensive renovation of the theater [since UCLA purchased it in 2018](#). They also programmed its inaugural season, which kicks off on Sept. 23 with Grammy Award-winning poet, spoken-word artist and songwriter J. Ivy.



CAP UCLA’s new artistic director Edgar Miramontes, left, with co-interim directors Meryl Friedman and Fred Frumberg inside the newly christened Nimoy Theater, formerly the historic Crest Theatre. (Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times)

Frumberg and Friedman say the state-of-the-art venue represents the intimate scale that CAP UCLA has longed for but never had — the kind of space that will allow it to truly experiment and

take chances on artists who might not be able to pack an 1,800-seat venue like UCLA's Royce Hall, CAP's longtime home on the university's campus.

"It's not that the 200 people sitting in an 1,800-seat house are not affected the same way. But it's a really hard hump to get over. And here you don't have to get over it. That's not a factor," says Friedman of the Nimoy. "It's intimate. It presents a different scale of success."

It's also less costly to program smaller shows for smaller audiences — a point of paramount concern in the post-COVID arts world, where many performing arts groups are suffering. Audiences are not attending live performances in the numbers that they were before the pandemic.

"We're responding to a very different financial climate," says Frumberg, adding that there is simply no way he can imagine doing 50 shows at Royce Hall right now. That number was once the norm, but it has dropped to seven post-pandemic. With the Nimoy, however, Frumberg and Friedman have been able to put 50 shows on the schedule.

"The only reason that we can do this many shows is because of the very nature of the shows," he says. "There are lower fees, fewer hotel rooms, lower production costs, less crew. ... It responds to what we should be doing right now until we figure out what lies on the other side of COVID."

Nobody knows what that will be, of course, but Frumberg and Friedman believe that gripping, evocative art that unites audiences through a shared experience represents the path forward.

"What makes people want to gather now for a live event if you're not Beyoncé or Taylor Swift?" asks Friedman. "How do you form community? What is it that makes people want to sit in a room with strangers and experience something together, and how far in advance do they make that decision?"

It has to be financially accessible and community-based, and it has to speak to what people want to hear. It also has to give joy, she says. CAP UCLA hopes to check all those boxes at the Nimoy.

Future seasons will be programmed with the help of [new artistic director Edgar Miramontes](#), who started in the position in August. He took over from [longtime leader Kristy Edmunds](#), who left in 2021 to head the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

Miramontes immigrated to L.A. from Mexico at age 8 and has a long history of advocacy and leadership in the arts, including his most recent position as deputy executive director and curator for the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater, better known as REDCAT. It was Edmunds who first lobbied UCLA to buy the Crest, and now Miramontes will help shape its vision.

Friedman says she is hugely excited to work with Miramontes and to witness the transformation of the Crest. After opening in 1940 as a live performance space, it has had [multiple incarnations as a movie theater](#). In 2008 the city of Los Angeles [designated it a historic landmark](#), but it has struggled to find an identity since then, and also has lain dormant for long stretches of time.

Susan Nimoy hopes the Nimoy Theater will further enliven the neighborhood and catalyze growth in nearby restaurants, museums and entertainment venues. She also says there are huge advantages to having a university venue off-campus.

Frumberg and Friedman agree. It is easier to get to, and easier to park at the Nimoy than it is on campus, but it also signals that the university is invested in the city. And with \$35 tickets and \$15 student tickets, it should be a reasonably priced night out.

“It has a certain kind of accessibility and a community visibility that being on campus doesn’t have,” says Friedman. “It’s sometimes hard to be friendly behind the edifice of the ivory tower.”

Coming to an art event, she says, should not be a privileged activity. The Nimoy aims to prove it.