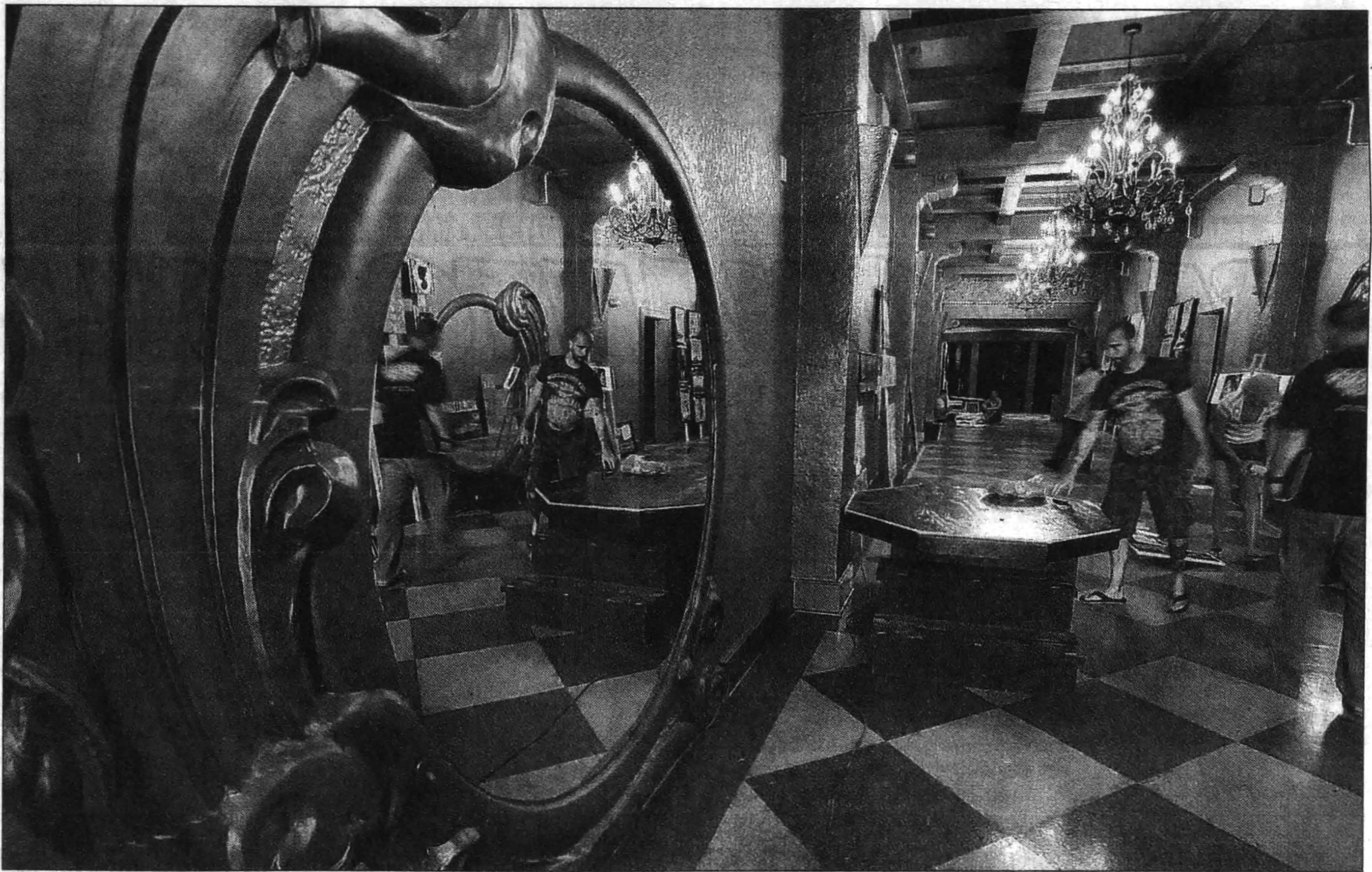




# Dazzling Glitz Blitz Hits Ritz

Concert Will Celebrate Restoration Of Historic Ybor City Theater



Tribune photos by CLIFF McBRIDE

Artists at the Ritz Theatre prepare for the Saturday concert. The Ritz is one of the area's last remaining theaters from the early 20th century.

## THE RITZ THEATRE

**WHAT:** Celebration of renovated theater, featuring Bogus Pomp

**WHEN:** Saturday at 9 p.m.

**WHERE:** Ritz Theatre, corner of Seventh Avenue and 15th Street, Ybor City

**HOW MUCH:** \$25 at the door; (813) 247-2555

By KURT LOFT  
The Tampa Tribune

**T**AMPA — They're puttin' the Ritz back into Ybor City.

One of the area's grand old structures refuses to buckle under age or neglect, and this weekend makes plenty of noise about its future.

The historic Ritz Theatre, which opened on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 15th Street during World War I, presents its first concert after an initial \$750,000 in improvements. Instead of being reduced to silence or rubble, the Ritz is enjoying a restoration that its owners hope will revive nine decades of memories.

"This was a place to go when I was a kid," said Joseph Capitano, 70, who purchased the building in 1988. "We'd all come to here to see movies."

The Ritz is one of the area's last theaters from the early 20th century still standing. Its more famous cousin — the Tampa Theatre on Franklin Street — opened in 1926, nearly a decade after the Ritz.

It was known as the Rivoli in those days, and over the years wore a number of different names, from the Ritz Adult Theater to the Masquerade night club. It served as a movie house until the

See RITZ THEATRE, Page 6 ►  
The Capitanos own several iconic Ybor structures.



# A Long, Colorful History

- **1917:** Rivoli theater opens
- **1920s:** Theater presents silent films and burlesque acts
- **1934:** Robbers steal \$2,000 in cash and \$4,000 in jewelry from theater's safe
- **1950s:** Theater features sci-fi and Spanish-language films, charging 60-cent admission
- **1966:** Renamed Ritz Adult Theater
- **1967:** Stripper Ann Howe arrested for baring breasts on stage
- **1968:** Theater undergoes \$77,000 in improvements
- **1970:** Tampa police raid theater for showing triple X movie "Man and Wife"
- **1982:** Ritz Adult Theater closes
- **1983:** City and state funds earmarked to enhance Ritz and Centro Espanol
- **1984:** Restored Ritz reopens after \$300,000 renovation
- **1987:** Theater is shut down, windows boarded
- **1988:** Playmakers theater group makes Ritz its new home
- **1990:** Owners of Masquerade night club lease the Ritz
- **2006:** Masquerade closes
- **2008:** Theater revitalized by \$750,000 worth of upgrades

"It's a totally new space," Zaccaro said. "If all goes well, we'll be bringing in national acts: jazz, blues, pop, rock and comedy."

The flurry of activity that begins this weekend, Capitano said, inevitably will help preserve what the Ritz has meant to Ybor.

"We're trying to save some of these old buildings," he said. "And we want to bring in events that will help make Ybor vital again."

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Tribune photos by CLIFF McBRIDE

The new concert hall features an 18,000-square-foot Theatre Ball Room with room for 1,000 seats. There also are new lights, stage, dressing rooms and fancy bathrooms.

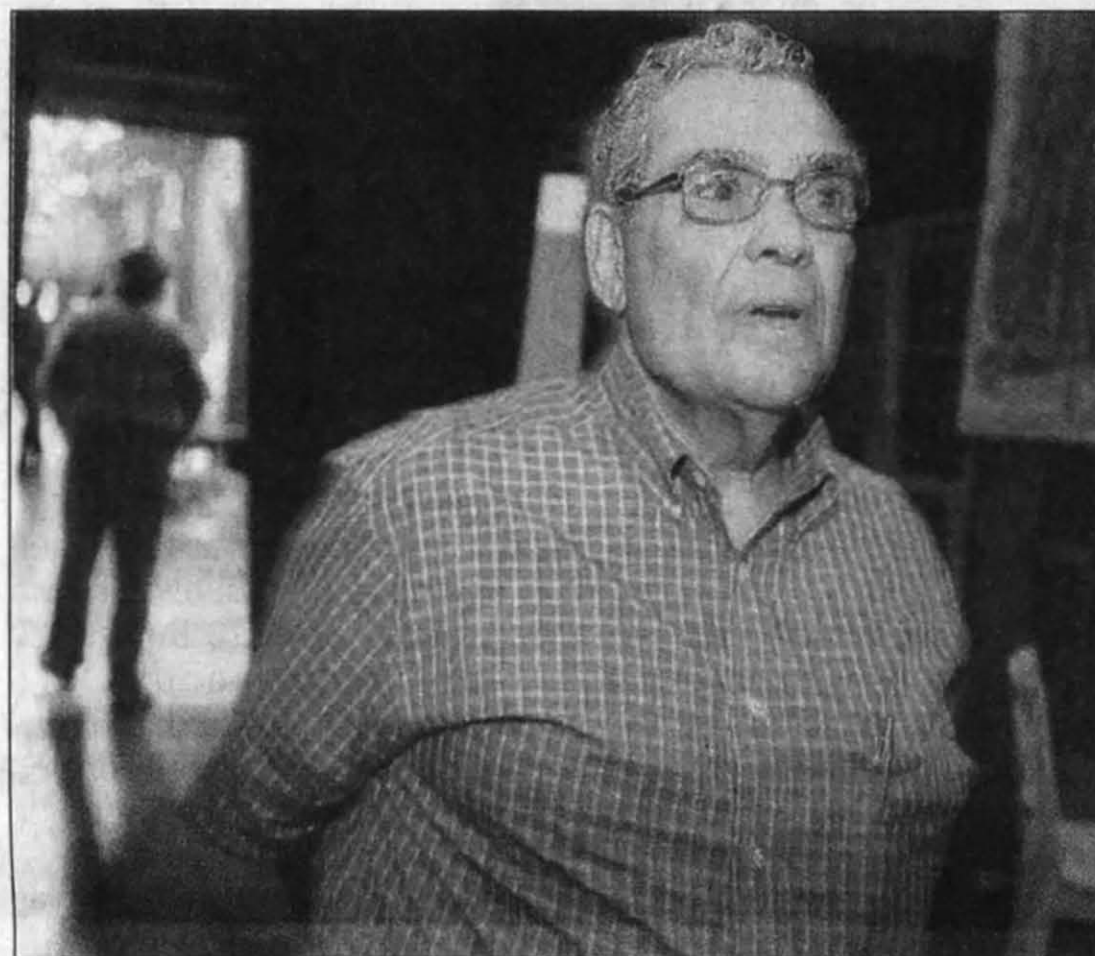
## RITZ THEATRE

Continued From Page 1

1970s, featuring first-run films, and later cheesy 1950s sci-fi flicks. Its run as forum for triple X movies stirred up plenty of ire in the community.

The structure itself was built to last, surviving the decaying years of Ybor City after World War II, and the much-maligned urban renewal efforts of the 1960s. Although Ybor was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973 (it became a National Historic Landmark District in 1989), the Ritz eventually became a tired and bleak-looking place, said Frank Zaccaro, a Tampa concert promoter who has booked Bogus Pomp for Saturday. The band specializes in the music of the late Frank Zappa.

"The Ritz was one step away from condemnation," he said. "Now it's going to be a viable



"This was a place to go when I was a kid," said Joseph Capitano, 70, the owner since 1988. "We'd all come to here to see movies."

space for musical acts, smaller than the Tampa Theatre but larger than a night club."

The Capitano family, which owns a half-dozen iconic Ybor structures, all along felt the Ritz had class underneath its rough surface. So they invested a considerable sum of their

personal money into the makeover, much to the satisfaction of Manny Leto, an Ybor City historian and editor of Cigar City Magazine.

"Any time you can preserve the historical structures and fabric of Ybor, it's a positive," he said. "Over the years, the



Nicole Capitano talks about plans for the theater. The Capitano family hopes the theater will play a large role in revitalizing Ybor.

Ritz has been an anchor of Ybor, with a great history of theater and the arts."

The new transformation from night club to concert hall features an 18,000-square-foot Theatre Ball Room with room for 1,000 seats over a black-and-white checkered floor,

smaller Rivoli and Royal rooms for private parties and an ornate Grand Foyer entrance.

The renovation includes a new stage and dressing rooms, velour curtains along the walls, lighting system and ornate Mediterranean-style bathrooms.