

2 Theaters Ready to Open in Los Angeles

Playhouses Will Be Part of Extensive Music Center

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LOS ANGELES, April 7 — The curtain will rise on a new era in theater here next week when two theaters open, completing the city's \$33.5-million Music Center.

The new houses are the Mark Taper Forum, opening Sunday, and the Ahmanson, which will start operations Wednesday.

Joining the 3,250-seat Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on a seven-acre downtown site, the 750-seat Forum and the 2,100-seat Ahmanson provide a focus for theatrical activity that has been lacking in this amorphous city.

Gov. Ronald Reagan will officiate at the premiere performances in both theaters and at other dedication week ceremonies. The Center Theater Group, a resident acting company directed by Gordon Davidson, will present John Whiting's "The Devils" in the Forum on Sunday, and the touring company of "Man of La Mancha," with Richard Kiley and Joan Diener of the original cast, will open the Ahmanson.

In addition, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra will play Sunday afternoon, and the Metropolitan Opera's National Company will be at the Pavilion all week.

The three-theater center, designed by Welton Beckett and Associates, is, says William Severns, general manager of the Music Center Operating Company, "one of the most flexible performing-art-centers in the world."

The Pavilion, which opened in December, 1964, houses grand opera, ballet, musical comedy and orchestral concerts. The Ahmanson is to be used for drama, musical comedy, intimate opera and events not requiring the more extensive facilities of the Pavilion.

Intimate and experimental drama created by the Center Theater Group will dominate the Forum, which is also adaptable for recitals, chamber-music concerts, discussion forums and civic receptions.



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Two buildings that will open next week at \$33.5-million Music Center in Los Angeles are the Ahmanson Theater, lower left, and the Mark Taper Forum, round building next to it. They join the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, right of center. Also visible are the Water and Power Building, right, and County Courthouse, left of Chandler Pavilion.

Although both theaters were completely financed by such persons as S. Mark Taper and Howard F. Ahmanson, they are on county property and are controlled by the nonprofit operating company.

Mr. Taper is president and chairman of the board of the First Charter Financial Corporation of Beverly Hills. Among the banking institutions of which Mr. Ahmanson is board chairman is the Ahmanson Bank and Trust Company here.

Like a smaller, refined version of the Washington Square ANTA Theater in New York, the Forum has an interior that virtually wraps the audience around a pentagonal thrust stage in 14 semi-oval rows of multicolored seats. The 28-foot thrust of the stage, with a maximum width of 30 feet, gives an

illusion of close contact with each spectator in the sharply inclined bowl of amphitheater seats.

The Center Theater Group, formerly the professional company of the University of California at Los Angeles, expects to continue seeking experimental approaches to theater. Gordon Davidson, its artistic director, says, "I try to select an exciting season, which is more difficult than just picking a bunch of good plays."

The Ahmanson is less flamboyant than the Forum and the ornate Pavilion. Although its auditorium incorporates two balconies, with 1,000 seats in the orchestra, 500 in the parqu岸 terrace and 600 in the gallery, the audience shape has been kept square to avoid what

Mr. Beckett calls the tunnellike effect of rectangular seating.

Elliott Martin, general director of the theater group, says although "Man of La Mancha" is a good show" it definitely is not typical of "what we intend to present at the Ahmanson." Mr. Martin, co-producer of "Dinner at Eight" on Broadway this season, cites as more typical his first announced production for the fall, O'Neill's "More Stately Mansions," with José Quintero directing.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has discussed the possibility of a censorship committee to examine productions at the Music Center. The board is concerned that "The Devils" may require deletions, despite its previous productions in London and New York.