

Curtain rises



The Sheboygan Symphony Orchestra gives the debut performance Saturday at the Stefanie H. Weill Center for the Performing Arts, which features the restored Sheboygan Theatre. The orchestra opened with "Also Sprach Zarathustra," the theme song of "2001: A Space Odyssey." Press photo/**Jeffrey Machtig**

Restored theater opens to rave reviews

By **Kurt Rentmeester**

Sheboygan Press staff

Just spectacular. Just breathtaking.

The adjectives flowed freely among guests at the Sheboygan Theatre Saturday evening as guests filled the 1,162-seat theater to capacity for a benefit concert to mark its refurbishment.

Dr. John and Maggi Roblee of Sheboygan said the building, to be known as the Stefanie H. Weill Center for the Performing Arts, never looked better.

"There's a lot of husbands who were put in tuxedos tonight — that were planning on it," she said. "It's nice to see Sheboygan dressed up again and looking glamorous. Everyone worked so hard for so long to make this happen."

After a year of looking

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at scaffolding, Jennifer Lehrke, project manager for LJM Architects of Sheboygan, said those who recall what the building used to look like can appreciate the restoration the most.

"You'd never think they could make it this beautiful," said 21-year-old David Meinoff of Sheboygan, who used to see movies there.

Diana James of Fond du Lac remembered coming to the theater while growing up in the 1940s and 1950s. She and a friend, Helen Dietz of Fond du Lac, were there



Jessi Brunette, left, and George Wright of Sheboygan check out the restored Sheboygan Theatre on Saturday before the first performance at the Weill Center. Press photo/**Jeffrey Machtig**

to see James' nephew, Peter Tiboris, perform with orchestra.

"I've never been in this theater before. But it's just breathtaking," Dietz said.

Abbie Willits came from Elkhart Lake to hear

her husband sing with the chorus. Oran Bushman of Manitowoc was there to hear his wife, Ruth Bushman, play in the second violin section. With him

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was his son, Michael Bushman of Chicago.

"It gives it (the Capitol Civic Centre in Manitowoc) a run for its money," Oran Bushman said.

Elain Stolzenburg, who was heading the box office for the orchestra, overheard one visitor say "For Sheboygan, we can't believe it," referring to the restoration.

After guiding the \$9.75 million restoration, the compliments may have meant a lot to Carl Grube, president of the Sheboygan Community Theatre Foundation Inc., and Vice President Bob Peterson.

"The comments are basical-

"It's spectacular. It's just spectacular."

Maggi Roblee

ly just 'Wow,'" Peterson said.

"I see a lot of smiling faces tonight. And that's kind of nice," Grube said.

Timpanis and strings demonstrated the acoustics of the plasterwork and concrete balcony.

Others anticipated the reappearance of twinkling fibre optic constellations overhead as the music began.

"It's spectacular," Maggi Roblee said. "It's just spectacular."

Weill Fund, others donated to theater

Restoration cost \$9.75 million

By Kurt Rentmeester

Sheboygan Press staff

The woman for whom the Stefanie H. Weill Center for the Performing Arts was named lived the last 45 years of her life in Sheboygan, where she was recognized as a lover and supporter of the fine arts.

A major share of the cost to refurbish the 72-year-old Sheboygan Theatre was paid for with a \$2.5 million contribution from the Stefanie H. Weill Charitable Fund. The Sheboygan Community Theatre Foundation agreed in 1997 to

accept the money, which will be paid during a 10-year period.

Built by Universal Pictures Corp. in 1928, the theater was the subject of a \$9.75 million restoration this year. It reopened Saturday at 826 N. Eighth St.

The former Stefanie Byk married John Weill in 1936 in Austria, where he ran Thonet Industries in Vienna. The couple became naturalized U.S. citizens at about the time he purchased the American Chair Co. in Sheboygan in 1941.

John Weill was president of the company until 1966. He died a year later. His widow remained active in the city, involved in social, civic and cultural life until her death in 1985.

Also established in the mem-

ory of the couple and Stefanie's late brother, Otto Byk, was the Weill/Byk Public Trust. That fund was used to build a terrace to the east and north sides of Mead Public Library. The Weill Charitable Fund commissioned a clock on the north terrace in 1997.

Several other donations were received for the refurbishment of the Sheboygan Theatre, said Bob Peterson, vice president of the Sheboygan Community Theatre Foundation Inc.

They include \$750,000 from the Walter and Charlotte Kohler Charitable Trust and \$1.1 million from the James French Family, as well as a series of donations that range from \$250,000 to \$500,000.