

NINA MOINI: From silent cinema to modern movies, there's only one movie theater in the Twin Cities that can say it has lived through it all. The Heights Theater in Columbia Heights is celebrating 100 years. The one-screen theater has been through a lot, as has the movie industry, and it's celebrating its legacy starting tomorrow, October 1. Joining me now with more on this centennial celebration is the co-owner of The Heights, Ryan Oestreich. Thanks for being with us, Ryan. Congratulations.

RYAN OESTREICH: Thank you. Thank you for having me on your show, Nina.

NINA MOINI: So for folks who are maybe unfamiliar with The Heights, I tried to give a brief history there. I know it's been a hundred years. This isn't your standard modern movie theater. When people walk through the doors, can you just give a description of what they see?

RYAN OESTREICH: I like to say you're walking through a living museum. Because everything has become multiplexes and megaplexes. What you walk through is you see an old-school lobby, something smaller, something more ornamental and decorative. You only have one ticket counter and one small concession stand. And it just sort of passes you through a space that then prepares you for the main auditorium, which is this beautiful Beaux-Arts-designed single screen.

So instead of walking through hallways upon hallways to find theater 1 through 30 or going through a giant concession stand, you're actually going right in through to experience a very beautiful, ornate interior of an auditorium that takes you back in time. And that is intentional because we're trying to show folks what it's like to experience a movie, a today movie, but in the experience of the 1920s.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, and I think everyone is looking for that nostalgic experience of the movies right now too. I feel like people are-- it's having maybe a bit of a resurgence. But you also show classic films. So can you tell me a little bit about just the variety of movies people can see?

RYAN OESTREICH: Well, I think it's clear that folks have an interest in seeing all types of movies, whether they be new or old.

NINA MOINI: Sure.

RYAN OESTREICH: Or maybe they heard about old movies and were like, I wonder what that's like to see on the big screen. Or maybe they've heard about live accompaniment to a silent film, and that was the only way to see movies back in the day. And so we can bring all of that back to life because we have an organ. It's a pipe organ that people can listen to while you're seating and getting that experience, but also that pipe organ can be played for a silent film.

And so what classic cinema, or what we call repertory cinema, does is it allows you to go back and experience films through the decades. Because film history is incredibly important. And the other thing that a lot of people don't like to talk about is movies kind of recycle their themes, and they get remade, rewritten. So you see the same themes over and over and over again in movies. And sometimes you don't realize that, oh, that great movie that I love, that's been done before--

NINA MOINI: It's a rewrite.

RYAN --and maybe even done better. Yeah, exactly. And so seeing it in a classic way is kind of an important way to experience cinema.

OESTREICH:

NINA MOINI: Yeah. And so more cool, like, cinema-buff, movie-buff stuff, The Heights is one of the few theaters--

RYAN Oh, no, no, not just cinema buffs, everybody. It's for everybody.

OESTREICH:

NINA MOINI: Yeah, no. Break it down for everyone, I was going to say. So The Heights is one of the few theaters in the state that has a way to show 35 millimeter and 70 millimeter films. Can you explain what makes that so special?

RYAN Yeah, that was the way movies started. Movies were only shown on this tangible, physical, celluloid format.

OESTREICH: Actually, long, long ago, movies were shown on nitrate, which The Heights Theater was able to show on a nitrate. But that is so flammable that they stopped making that because there were fires.

But then it moved to celluloid, which is much better. And it's got a plastic in it. But celluloid gives a warmth to the image. It's kind of like, people like to say, vinyl records to like listening to something on Spotify.

NINA MOINI: Sure.

RYAN There's something a little bit more rich to the experience, to the sound, to the sound processor, and the way the sound strip is read off the analog projectors. And so for us, we have reel-to-reel, which is really important because then we get to show archival prints. And so 35, we show a lot of it. 70 is really having a resurgence thanks to Christopher Nolan and Quentin Tarantino and Paul Thomas Anderson and a lot of directors who are shooting on 70 and getting an experience on it.

And so we're able to show anything new that is getting a 70 or 35 release and anything classic. And that experience, a lot of people go out of their way to experience it that way over another way. It's like some people talk about IMAX or something called a premium or widescreen. I think celluloid gives you that richer experience that people go out of their way to look for.

NINA MOINI: So much history there, and including in the origins of the theater. It opened during Prohibition. What do you about how it got started?

RYAN Well, yeah. So it was a brewer, Arthur Gluek. He opened it, and it was during Prohibition. So I'm wondering if he was looking for a way to make money.

OESTREICH:

NINA MOINI: Cover.

RYAN Yeah, or cover. Yeah, could be a little seedier than I even. There is a huge basement at The Height, so maybe there was stuff going on. But he opened it in 1926, and he opened it as far down the trolley line as he could, so basically at the end of Central Avenue, so where it basically met corn-- like farms, probably corn and whatever else that they were making.

He owned it for about six years. And it had a myriad amount of ownership between that time. But it survived a lot in all of its times. There were three fires.

NINA MOINI: Wow.

RYAN The projectionists union bombed the front of the building--

OESTREICH:

NINA MOINI: Oh, no.

RYAN --because there was this really intense union back in the day. It survived a tornado, like where the blade sign was

OESTREICH: straight-up bent. The building was OK, but the front, if you could imagine the facade just being completely kind of swayed and bent. And all of the industry changes-- think VCRs. Think streaming. Think the television set that came into everybody's home.

NINA MOINI: No, it's amazing.

RYAN So yeah, it's had a lot of different owners and a lot of different things that it's survived. Honestly, I'm shocked

OESTREICH: that it's still around, but also very happy it is.

NINA MOINI: Well, there's a lot to celebrate. So tell us a little bit about the actual celebration. What are people going to be able to see? How can they get involved?

RYAN Yeah, sure. So one film for every decade that we've been open-- so technically, we're in our 11th decade, so from

OESTREICH: the '20s, '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s, and so on. We show-- we go all the way back to the '20s. So we have, of course, a silent film. And our house organist, Ed Copeland, he'll be doing a live performance for it. And it's actually his favorite film. It's called *Safety Last!* with Harold Lloyd, a very famous silent comedian.

And then, of course, we have some touches to some of our programming that people know and then some kind of fun things. Like for the 1940s, we're doing the original Disney *Pinocchio* because now The Heights under our ownership has doing classic cinema for families every Saturday. And then we of course touch on some films people love, like *The Shining* from the 1980s, or something that redefined comedy, like Monty Python.

NINA MOINI: I was going to ask how you decide, how you decide what movie per decade.

RYAN Well, it's not to say that that film represents everything from that decade. So it's more a mix of, do we have a

OESTREICH: connection to it? Does the city have a connection to it? Did we play it back in the day? Did it have some-- did it do something for cinema? Like in the 1990s, we're representing the '90s with *The Matrix*, which I think really changed the way we show action in movies and brought kind of a resurgence for the science fiction idea.

And because we also are part of our Chicago home down in Music Box, we have relationships with the filmmakers. So this one was really special. We actually have the filmmaker's personal 35 millimeter print of *The Matrix* that we're showing. So that's like a little extra surprise for folks that are going to experience it. It's beautiful. It's pristine. So yeah, it's a little bit all over the place. But October 1 through the 8, we're going to show all 11 films. Sometimes they get shown twice.

NINA MOINI: OK.

RYAN Tickets are available on our website, super easy to find. You can also buy tickets at the door. And if you go on our

OESTREICH: website, you can find out about all the movies. And then if you come, we're going to have a nice little program guide that tells you the history of The Heights, so way more than we were able to cover in our conversation here. And it'll be like a souvenir guide so that you can hold on to and remember that you were a part of our hundred-year celebration.

NINA MOINI: Amazing, Ryan. Thank you so much. I love hearing the passion that you have and that you're able to provide this novel service to everyone. It's amazing. Thank you, and have a great time.

**RYAN
OESTREICH:** Thank you so much for having me on your show.

NINA MOINI: Ryan Oestreich is co-owner of The Heights Theater in Columbia Heights, celebrating 100 years.