

The Evolution of the Asolo



If nothing else, Sarasota, Florida is a blend of culture: people from all across the globe live, work and spend leisurely days right next to the gorgeous, white-sand beaches. Historic landmarks and art museums grace our small town with a big-city feel, and some of the best musical and dramatic theatre in the world is found here. If Sarasota were to credit just one place in the world for her theatrical magnitude, it would be none other than Asolo, Italy.

More than 200 years ago, the original Asolo Theater (pronounced "AHZ-uh-low" by Italians) was constructed by a man named Antonio Locatelli in the town of Asolo, Italy. The town flourished under the direction of the former Queen of Cyprus, Italy, Caterina Cornaro, and the Asolo Theater was built in her hon-

that would affect the people and culture of southwest Florida. It became a well-known performance venue on the grounds of the Ringling Museum, but suffered lack of maintenance and closed in 1989.

The tangible Asolo Theater spans several eras and time zones. FSU first began appearing in Sarasota in 1948 with an Annual Art Symposium. The university's theatre program developed the Symposium, and one of their original plays was the first production to link the independent acting program to the Asolo Theater.

FSU's theatre program continued to use the Asolo as a performance setting until a faculty member, Arthur Dorlag, improved on an idea to present a summertime festival of 17th and 18th century comedies: the Asolo Theatre Festival. The festival continued for several years until 1966, when a federal grant allowed the festival to expand into a

year-round, professional acting company, known as the Asolo Theatre Company.

The name "Asolo" spread wider still in 1973, when FSU created the Asolo/FSU Conservatory for Actor Training, based in Sarasota and the Asolo Touring Theatre increased to three individual touring companies. The Asolo Theatre Company's audiences grew in numbers and in national acclaim.

The company had become a basis for theatrical art in southwest Florida, and an on-going dream of a bigger, more accommodating space for performances materialized in 1989. The Asolo Theatre Company retired the original Asolo Theater as their main show stage and began performing at a new location across the street. The building was originally called the Asolo Performing Arts Center, and in 1991 became the FSU Center for the Performing Arts.

In 2006, everything Asolo in Sarasota took on a change. After over two

By April Nowicki



years of renovation, the worn, blackened remnants of the original Asolo Theater were mounted at a new location. Long-time and brand new Asolo supporters gathered at the Ringling Museum for the Opening Night Gala on October 6, 2006. The theater was re-named the Historic Asolo Theater in honor of its enduring reputation for fine drama and inspiration to actors everywhere.

Also in 2006, the Asolo Theatre Company changed its name as a means of differentiating itself, and to reflect their status as one of the only repertory theatres in the country. The company now goes by the Asolo Repertory Theatre, a tribute to both its origin and the quality, professional theatre it produces. Rotating repertory entails a different theatrical showing on almost every night of the week, performed by many of the same actors and actresses.

The Asolo Theater currently resides in the Ringling Museum Visitors Pavilion. Guidelines are in place to maintain and protect this piece of history for a long time to come, and the acting company that began in this space has undergone numerous changes in order to become the collection of artistic talent it is today. Without the support and encouragement of local followers, none of Sarasota's collective Asolo substance would exist, and our eminent theater might have been forgotten and lost in time.



or. Its reputation for fine performances grew as more and more of the finest actors from the best theatrical companies performed there.

Many years later in the 1930s, the theater was dismantled and kept in the private art collection storage of Venetian Adolph Loewi. There it stayed, until the first director of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, "Chick" Austin, contacted Loewi to buy the stored theater in 1946.

Austin shipped the pieces of the theater to Florida and six years later, the Asolo Theater began a long legacy