

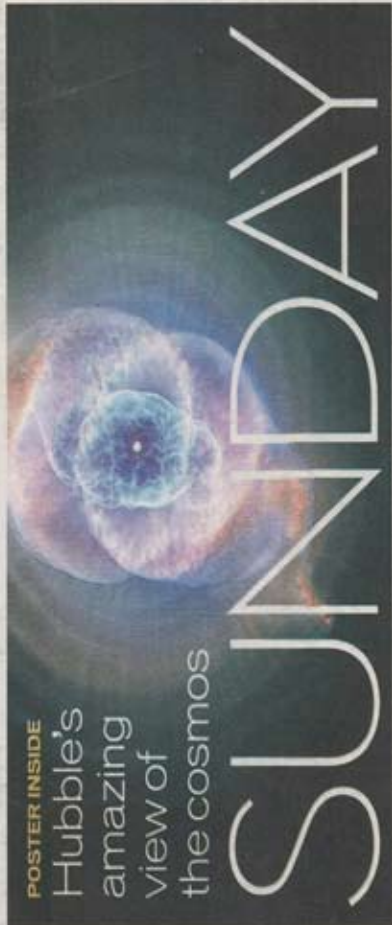
A MOTHER'S STORY

A life cut short, but a dream completed at NSU. **hampton roads**

COMPANY UNDER FIRE

Pay a fee, get a job? Don't buy it, these folks say. **business**

Our 144th year | 05.10.09 | PILOTONLINE.COM | 82 In Hampton Roads

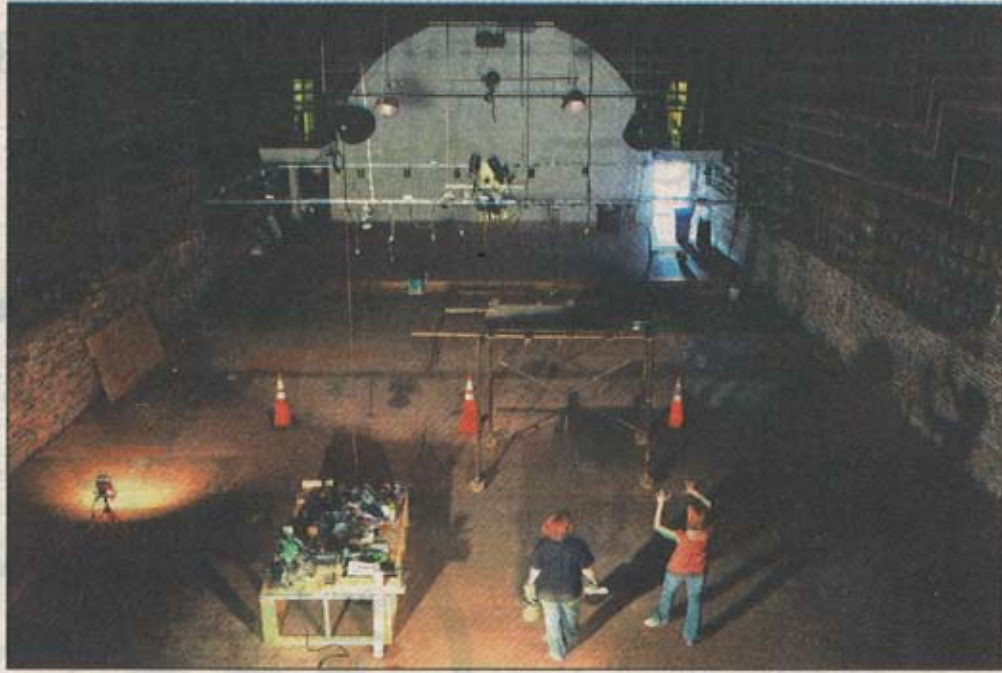


POSTER INSIDE
Hubble's amazing view of the cosmos

SUNDAY

The Virginian-Pilot

A VOLUNTEER EFFORT



THOMAS SLUSSER | SPECIAL TO THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Susan Winstin, left, of Norfolk and Karen Ainsley of Chesapeake volunteer their time for renovations to the future home of the Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra - the New Colony Theatre at 430 High St.

Virginia Youth Symphony restores life to Colony Theatre

By Lia Russell
The Virginian-Pilot

A group of young musicians is bringing new life to an old theater in downtown Portsmouth.

The Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1998 by composer and conductor Robert Ian Winstin, will soon call the old Colony Theatre, at 430 High St., its new home.

The building was built around 1901, initially housing a YMCA. It became a theater for live performances in the 1920s and started show-

ing motion pictures in the 1940s. In the 1980s and early '90s, it was home to a series of nightclubs, but has been closed since 1994.

Apartments above the theater have remained occupied, but the 12,000 square feet of space that includes a stage, dressing rooms, a kitchen, lobby, second-floor lounge, restrooms and offices, was left untended for nearly 15 years.

The 58-member Virginia Youth Symphony is leasing the old theater, an example of Art

See COLONY, Page 8



THOMAS SLUSSER PHOTOS | SPECIAL TO THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Vincent Dixon, 14, of Virginia Beach and a member of the Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra, lends a hand and sweeps up the seating area of the Colony Theatre, a renovation in progress. Without the volunteers, owners estimate the costs at a half-million dollars in labor.



VIRGINIAN-PILOT FILE PHOTO

The Colony Theatre in 1951. The building was built around 1901, initially housing a YMCA. It became a theater for live performances in the 1920s and started showing motion pictures in the 1940s. In the 1980s and early '90s, it was home to a series of nightclubs, but has been closed since 1994.

COLONY

Continued from Page 1

Deco design, with an option to buy.

The symphony is calling its new performance and rehearsal hall the New Colony Theatre, as a tribute to its origins, and will dedicate a wall in the lobby to photos of the building's history.

Winstin, 49, and his wife, Susan, are funding most of the building's considerable renovations and, with the help of symphony members and community volunteers, are doing much of the work themselves.

Winstin said that the building is structurally sound, but needs extensive cosmetic work, including removal of rotting drywall, new flooring, painting and installation or reconstruction of entire walls. It also needs new electrical wiring and plumbing to meet the building code requirements.

Ashley Guy, 13, a violinist with the youth symphony, said she and her parents, Robin and Phil Guy, spend nearly every weekend working on the building.

On a recent Saturday, Ashley's face was pockmarked with black paint as she worked on the finishing touches of a backstage dressing room. She was one of more than a dozen volunteers who showed up to help.

"When we first came in, there were holes in the floor," Ashley said.

"There were ancient nails sticking out of the wall, and we spent a whole day taking them out. And the kitchen was disgusting. It's really come a long way."

Much of the renovation will have to be done by volunteers.

"It would cost about half a million



Ashley Guy, 13, of Virginia Beach and a member of the Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra, volunteers to help paint the backstage area. Ashley said she and her parents, Robin and Phil Guy, spend nearly every weekend working on the building.

dollars in labor and we couldn't afford that," said Winstin, who plans to move into the partially restored building June 1.

A master carpenter and a licensed electrician are donating their skills; the Portsmouth Sheriff's Office has offered inmate labor; and a contractor who demolished a Raleigh, N.C., theater provided 405 audience seats.

The lease on the symphony's current 3,000 square-foot building at 2618 Colley Ave. in Norfolk expires May 31, "so the timing is perfect," Winstin said.

He says the acoustics in the new

location are "excellent" and looks forward to an inaugural performance in October.

Although the nonprofit Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra performs only professional orchestral music and accepts new members by audition, Winstin said no one who has a desire to play and is motivated to improve is turned away.

"I've had some wonderful experiences and made great friends here," said violinist Marianne Argall, 18, a six-year VYSO member who recently attended her final rehearsal.

"I love the challenge of the mu-



Robert Winstin, conductor of the Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra, said he and his wife Susan, are funding most of the renovations of the theater.

sic, although I don't think I would have said that initially. The first time I played, I thought I was gonna die."

Members, ages 12 to 18, pay a \$315 yearly tuition and practice together three hours every Sunday afternoon.

They hold four local performances each year and tour annually to places like London, Paris, Athens and Vienna.

During last week's rehearsal, the group played a Broadway medley and music from "Lord of the Rings" as Winstin offered encouragement, advice and interesting metaphors. "You know what you sounded like?" he asked during a particularly difficult score.

"A 1987 Chrysler K-Car. Now let's try to sound like (Ford) Mustangs."

For more information about the Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra, visit www.vyso.us or call 395-0268.

Lia Russell, 222-5829, lia.russell@pilotonline.com

GOING?

What Virginia Youth Symphony Orchestra Outdoor Concert

When 7:30 p.m. June 20

Where Buckroe Beach, Hampton

Cost Free

Info www.vyso.us or 395-0268