

## **DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING (DCP) APPLICATION**

### **Fountain Theatre Outdoor Stage**

#### **Project Description:**

The Fountain Theatre seeks approval to assemble eighteen 4'x8' modular steel-deck platforms in its empty parking lot for the purpose of configuring a temporary open-air outdoor stage where public performances may be held in compliance with State/County/City COVID-19 guidelines.

The Fountain Theatre is a small nonprofit arts organization in its 30<sup>th</sup> year of serving the citizens of Los Angeles. The mission of the Fountain Theatre is to create, develop and publicly produce plays that reflect the diversity of Los Angeles, to serve young people through educational outreach programs, and to enhance the lives of the public with Community Engagement activities. For three decades, The Fountain has earned acclaim and admiration nationwide, been honored with more than 200 awards for artistic excellence and is a leader in the LA theatre community. The organization is proud to count its LA City Councilmember, Mitch O'Farrell, and Mayor Eric Garcetti (the Fountain's prior Councilmember) as supporters, reflecting our successful history of partnering with City government. In addition to being a Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs grant recipient for decades, the Fountain launched a ground-breaking program that brings celebrity actors to LA City Hall to perform one-night free public readings of scripts in the City Council chambers.

The Fountain Theatre owns the two tracts of property upon which its two-story building and adjacent parking are located. Both parcels are paid in full. No mortgage is owed.

The project is the organization's survival response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fountain Theatre's doors have been closed since March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020, due to the coronavirus. Prohibited by city and county health regulations from presenting public performances, the Fountain has received a small fraction of its typical earned income for more than seven months. It furloughed its staff, instituted strict budget measures, and has sought philanthropic giving to keep the organization financially afloat.

The Fountain Theatre's performance space is intimate: it holds just 78 fixed seats. Even when citywide COVID cases drop to a permissible level and the Fountain's doors are allowed to reopen, six-foot social distancing restrictions will reduce the already-small seating capacity to twelve. This is not financially feasible for the Fountain to survive. Until a vaccine for COVID-19 is mass-delivered and the Fountain can once again fill its house to capacity, the indoor theatre is unusable. With it goes the organization's foremost source of earned income.

Therefore, the Fountain asks for Long Term Temporary Use approval to assemble a modular open-air stage outdoors in the parking lot in compliance with LA County COVID regulations. The plan calls to obtain 18 modular 4'x8' steel-deck platforms from Steeldeck, Inc. The height of each platform is 3 feet. Each platform is retractable and removable. The standard configuration of platforms will create a stage area measuring 36'x16'. Stage lighting equipment will attach to a grid of metal 10-foot trusses provided and installed by Merrill Carson Entertainment, LLC. Audio speakers will be fastened to the trussing, as well as on safety-poles on the perimeter of the property.

No addition, permanent or temporary, to any existing structure is proposed.

The public will enter and exit in separate lanes via the existing entrance to the parking lot on the south side of Fountain Avenue. The outdoor seating capacity will be 84. Portable chairs will be configured in 7 rows with 12 chairs in each row, six feet apart, in accordance with COVID safety guidelines for social distancing. A concession table will offer safety-packed refreshments at the rear of the lot. Twelve high-top tables (3 rows of 4) will accommodate the public.

The actors and stage crew will use the entire two-story building of the Fountain Theatre as their dressing rooms and prep areas. COVID safety guidelines (and union requirements) mandate that performers and stage management be distanced, access be controlled, and environments be cleaned. Because the building has been closed to the public since March, it provides the perfect cocoon for safety, with several rooms empty and available on both floors to accommodate cast and crew.

The public will park on the street (Fountain Avenue and neighboring side streets), as they have for 30 years when attending the Fountain Theatre. A sizable parking lot is within walking distance on Santa Monica Blvd and Mariposa Street.

Performances on the Outdoor Stage will begin Friday & Saturday @ 8pm, Sunday @ 7pm, Monday @ 8pm. All performances will end no later than 10pm. By 11pm, the public will be gone, all lights and equipment will be shut off, the parking lot will be dark and silent.

The Outdoor Stage will have minimal negative impact on neighborhood residents and businesses. Fortunately for this project, the parking lot is surrounded by tall trees (light and sound barriers), a vacant apartment building and a retail tire business not in use at the time of performances.

1. West of Property: The two-story apartment building that shares the parking lot property line on the west side (demarcated by a cement wall) has been vacant for more than six years. The building will remain empty for the foreseeable future. The property owner and the Fountain Theatre have had a positive relationship for years.
2. South of Property: Scott's Auto Repair Shop is closed at night, during the hours of operation for the project.
3. Southeast of Property: A single family home behind a very tall, substantial avocado tree. The owner is an older gentleman who is rarely home. He spends a considerable amount of time out of town.
4. North of Property: A row of very tall, thick cypress trees mask the front of the parking lot from view (and light/sound) on the Fountain Avenue side of the property.

When performances are underway, the surrounding trees and buildings will absorb the light and sound. All lighting instruments will be focused inward, toward the inner area of the parking lot (where the stage will be located). Never pointed outward toward the street.

## COVID-19 SAFETY GUIDELINES

The Outdoor Stage will only be operational when COVID-19 risk levels are moderate or minimal, as designated by the State of California, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, and the City of Los Angeles.

On October 21, 2020, the State of California issued permission for outdoor public performances of plays when the COVID-19 risk levels are at moderate or minimal, stating:

*Gatherings for live musical, theatrical, and other artistic performances are permitted outdoors subject to guidance that is being prepared by CDPH. Because such gatherings frequently involve the mixing of people from different communities creating a high risk of transmission of COVID-19, until that guidance is issued, such gatherings are allowed only in counties in the “Moderate” (orange) or “Minimal” (yellow) risk levels of the [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#). In addition, performances are permitted only if, in the exercise of their discretion, the relevant local or city health officer approves the precautions taken to ensure the safety of audience members, performers and others connected with the performance. Performances may have no more than 50 persons in the audience in counties in the “Moderate” risk level and no more than 100 in counties in the “Minimal” risk level. If a local or city health officer approves a performance, the officer shall notify CDPH of the approval within two business days. During approved performances, all audience members and others not performing must wear masks, and audience members from different households must be spaced at least six feet apart when seated or otherwise viewing the performance. Performers who are not wearing face coverings must be at least six feet apart from each other.*

In accordance with State guidelines, the Fountain Theatre will take the following COVID-19 safety protocols for its proposed Outdoor Stage:

**Box Office** – Tickets will be sold online and be paperless. Patrons attending a performance will check-in at the existing box office window (already featured with protective glass). No paper programs will be handed out.

**Public Entry/Exit** – A Fountain Theatre employee will be stationed at the point of entry. The temperature of each patron will be taken. Any patron with a fever will not be admitted. Every patron will be required to wear a mask. If the patron does not have a mask, one will be provided free of charge by the Fountain Theatre. To control proper distance, a stanchion will divide patrons to enter the performance area in one direction and exit the other.

**Seating:** 84 chairs will be paired in twos, with “bubble” couples seated together, each duo distanced six feet apart per COVID safety guidelines. The front row of seating will be 25 feet from the stage, per State COVID guidelines.

**Concessions:** Safety-packaged food and beverages will be offered for sale at the rear of the parking lot. 12 high-top tables will be positioned six feet apart for use by ‘bubbles’ or patrons from the same household.

**Public Bathrooms:** Patrons will be directed by staff to use public bathrooms in the existing Fountain Theatre building. Two unisex bathrooms are located at street level, two unisex bathrooms are located upstairs on the second floor. Patrons will be directed and monitored by

staff for safe-distanced access. All bathrooms have been inspected for proper air flow and ventilation per County Health COVID guidelines.

**Cleaning:** All publicly used areas, seats, bathrooms, stage area and backstage rooms will be cleaned and wiped down with disinfectant before and after each performance.

**IMPORTANT:** Fountain Theatre Producing Director, **Simon Levy**, is a Certified COVID-19 Compliance Officer. Trained to oversee and train:

- Screening Protocol
- PPE/Social Distancing
- Health Dept. Requirements
- Set Disinfection
- Staff Training

**Proposed Timetable:** The Fountain Theatre hopes to assemble the temporary Outdoor Stage in mid/late January 2021. Equipment installation and required inspections would take place throughout February. Public performances would begin in mid-March/early April. The Long Term Temporary Use would expire in one year.

The two tracts of property owned by the Fountain Theatre are zoned SEC. 12.10. “R3” Multiple Dwelling Zone. Since 1921, the building has been a school, a store, a duplex of apartments. For the last fifty years, it has been a live theatre. We have been grateful to be permitted to enhance the lives of the citizens of Los Angeles in our building for three decades. We ask, with this proposed project, to continue to do so temporarily by moving outside what we have always done indoors.

The limited period of time of the proposed temporary use assures that the project will not negatively impact the immediate neighborhood. On the contrary, the Outdoor Stage will contribute to the daily life of the community. In accordance with agreed-upon time and day usage, The Fountain intends to involve and engage local residents by providing an attractive and dynamic public space for the city to enjoy, for schools to bring students, for businesses and organizations to hold special events. Most urgent, the Outdoor Stage is essential for the financial recovery and survival of the Fountain Theatre during this COVID-19 emergency.

Now is the time for the City of Los Angeles to work with small local businesses in bold and creative new ways, to explore out-of-the-box thinking, so we get through this crisis together.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD SOUND:**

A priority for The Fountain Theatre is ensuring that any live or recorded sound emitted from the Outdoor Stage during a performance not have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood. All buildings sharing the property line of the Fountain Theatre parking lot are vacant or not in use during the hours of operation of the Outdoor Stage. Two residential properties are located across the street on Fountain Avenue, a significant distance from the proposed location of the Outdoor Stage in the parking lot. One residence is 177 feet away, the other is 206 feet away.

Both the City of Los Angeles Municipal Code and the Los Angeles County Code restrict noise control to a level not to exceed 95 decibels in a residential zone. The Fountain Theatre ensures that live or recorded sound coming from the Outdoor Stage will not exceed that level.

A recent article published in the Journal of Voice (September 2020, “Acoustic Characteristics of Vocal Sounds Used by Professional Actors Performing Classical Material Without Microphones in Outdoor Theatre”) determined that actors performing on an outdoor stage without microphones averaged a sound level at 82 decibels for females, 96 decibels for males.

On November 11, 2020, The Fountain Theatre performed two auditory tests at the location. Both tests were executed at 8pm (performance time of the Outdoor Stage). The Fountain tested (1) the neighborhood ambient noise level at that hour, and (2) amplified recorded sound emitted from speakers in the parking lot, to approximate an Outdoor Stage performance.

1. The neighborhood ambient sound is 52.1 decibels.
2. The amplified sound at performance level is 55.8

Conclusion: Tests performed by the Fountain Theatre conclude that live or recorded sound coming from the Outdoor Stage will not exceed levels permitted by County and City Codes. Moreover, the Fountain pledges to cooperate with neighborhood residents to ensure comfort levels are met.