

Jay Blakesberg



Gregg Perloff
Another Planet Entertainment

We all know Another Planet Entertainment CEO Gregg Perloff from years as one of the top concert promoters in the country, dating back to his time booking concerts for the University of California's Cal Performances series, to Bill Graham Presents and now with his own independent company.

But what makes him a subject for a venue executive profile is his work restoring the Fox Theater Oakland and turning the California venue into an economic engine not just for the city's entertainment district, but the San Francisco Bay Area as a whole.

What you may not know about Perloff is that he has a graduate degree from UC Berkeley in urban planning, from the school's College of Environmental Design's Department of City & Regional Planning. His father, Harvey S. Perloff, was founding Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UCLA.

The Fox Theater Oakland, a grand old movie palace near the city's core, had closed in the 1960s but, unlike many other similar buildings, was not demolished. Perloff had his eyes on the

deteriorating hulk for 25 years before the time was right to make a pitch for its redevelopment.

He had the education in urban planning and the arts, and the clout to make it happen.

The result has been spectacular, not just visually or in terms of box office success. The Fox Theater Oakland has been a linchpin in the revitalization of the city of Oakland over the last 10 or so years, an initiative supported by former mayor Jerry Brown.

The presence of a restored and highly successful Fox Theater has attracted new development in what's now called Uptown Oakland, including new housing, businesses and hotels in an area that was once better known for crime than concerts.

The impact of the Oakland Fox can't be overstated. It's had a ripple effect – particularly in the East Bay – across several counties. It's helped enormously to bring Oakland back from the brink of what could have been a city with a shell of a core and a few upscale neighborhoods on the fringes to a vibrant destination city.

The Fox Theater Oakland opened in 2009 after an \$86 mil-

lion renovation of the historic landmark, purchased by the city in 2006 and operated by Another Planet behind the leadership of GM Ruth Carlton and Allen Scott, APE Executive VP and talent buyer.

With architectural touches combining Indian, Moorish and medieval influences, the building was nearly named "The Baghdad" when it opened in 1928, according to the Contra Costa Times. Its intricate ceiling and godlike statues on either side of the stage are as much a part of the experience as the artists on it.

The Oakland School of the Arts has its home in the Fox Theatre and is a source of particular pride for Perloff, who says that the arts are an integral part of any city and the presence of the school ensures new generations of artists and educators for years to come.

I'll bet not many know you have a graduate degree in urban planning?

When I was in graduate school, and trying to save the world and dealing with nonprofits, I wrote a thesis on developing an integrated

arts component as part of a city's general plan. It was during a period before the whole idea of arts and public spaces in cities had taken hold. Now, it's really part of what cities look for and what developers want to do work on, whether it's part of a downtown development or in urban parks.

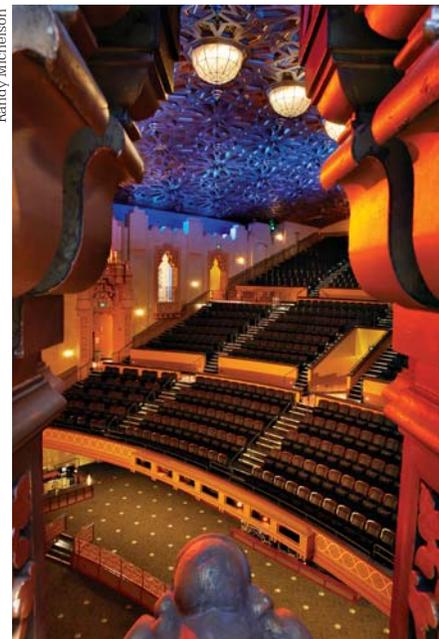
Urban planning is not just about sewage systems; it's not just about roads. The arts are an integral part of cities, too. As it has turned out, strangely enough, nowadays whenever you want to do anything you have to do an environmental impact report. My studies actually came in handy on a number of occasions, particularly in restoring buildings.

And led you to restoring the Fox Theater in Oakland?

I was involved with the restoration of the Wiltern Theatre in Los Angeles in 1985 and when the Fox Theater in Oakland came about, it was a no-brainer.

The Fox has been the catalyst of a remarkable transformation,

Randy Michelson



ANOTHER PLANET ENTERTAINMENT'S

Gregg Perloff and his team were able to fully renovate the Fox Theater Oakland, which sat empty for 42 years, with terraced seating and recently a new Meyer Sound system.

not just in terms of the fact that we do more than 100 shows annually, but that it's the most successful theater project I've ever been involved with, which says a lot. What it's done for Oakland and the entire San Francisco Bay Area is what makes me really proud.

The Fox Theater was built in 1928 as a movie palace and, like many of the great palaces, it shut down, in 1966. We were fortunate, because unlike the San Francisco Fox, which closed about the same time and was torn down due to a public vote taken shortly before the historic preservation movement took hold in the early 1970s, the Oakland Fox was not destroyed by the wrecking ball. There were many times that it might have been torn down while it remained dark for 42 years. When we reopened it in February of 2009, it was the first time it had ever been used as a concert hall.

We took this fabulous theater and transformed it into something, literally, that more than 1 million people have gotten to enjoy since we reopened. There were 34 entities involved in saving and underwriting the theater. The developer who put the deal together, Phil Tagami, did an amazing job in getting all the different government entities together to help put skin in the game, as they say.

The Oakland School for the Arts is based at the Fox. It's an amazing charter high school of 600 tremendously talented students, of which 98 percent of the graduating seniors have been placed in four-year colleges or universities. This was the brainchild of Gov. Jerry Brown (then-Oakland mayor).

In addition to involvement with the Oakland School for the Arts, Another Planet Entertainment and the Fox Theater gave the initial seed money for and support to UCSF Benioff Childrens Music Therapy program, which has three certified musical therapists working in Oncology/Hema-

tology, NICU, ICU, Rehabilitation and in the surgery/medical units.

The program is a wonderful thing because over 70 percent of the kids that go to Children's Hospital-Oakland do not have any insurance.

We think about people who nowadays get rushed out of the hospital; women and childbirth is an example. They are out in a day or two. What the public doesn't know is that there are kids who have horrible cancers and other life-threatening illnesses that are in the hospital for four, five or six months. Just the boredom and anxiety alone can be devastating. In different departments, we actually found that these kids get better, quicker because of this music therapy program. The program has grown to include siblings and caregivers.

Oakland had a challenging reputation as a place one didn't feel safe in, but now we hear about entertainment and great restaurants. How did that happen?

The Fox has really transformed what is now called "Uptown Oakland." Located on Telegraph Avenue, an iconic street just 5 miles from the UC Berkeley campus, the Fox is the focal point of the Uptown district of Oakland, where it's reshaped, revitalized and given vibrancy to the area and to the concert scene of the entire Bay Area. It is palpable.

The economy of Oakland has changed; now there are many nightlife establishments, renowned restaurants and bars, and residential living complexes. Just recently, Uber moved its international headquarters across the street from the Fox. That's exciting.

Many of these businesses report that when there's a show at the Fox, they have increases from 50 percent to 400 percent in sales. We forget that most restaurants or bars accommodate maybe 50 to 200 people at the most. When all of a sudden

Tom Tomkinson



THE FOX THEATER OAKLAND sports cutting-edge light and sound systems, and seats up to 2,800 for a variety of performances from Justice, seen here, to productions by the Oakland School of the Arts.

2,800 people are going to or getting out of a show and want to do something, we have an enormous impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

The *New York Times* did this story called "36 Hours in Oakland" and listed Oakland as one of the Top 10 destination cities in America. A lot of people don't understand what's going on in Oakland now. It's exciting, it's diverse and the arts community is driving the future.

President Obama made his first major Bay Area stop of the 2012 election cycle at the Fox Theater. That was incredibly exciting. We have presented so many important artists here, but the story of the Fox is what it has done for a city, people's aspirations, and the Bay Area as a whole.

When you rent an arena or a theater that's already there, and you put on a good show, those of us who are lucky enough to do that are really proud of a successful show with a great artist. But when you transform the cultural landscape and you develop a theater like this, it maybe only happens once in a lifetime. So I am so enormously ecstatic about having this opportunity.

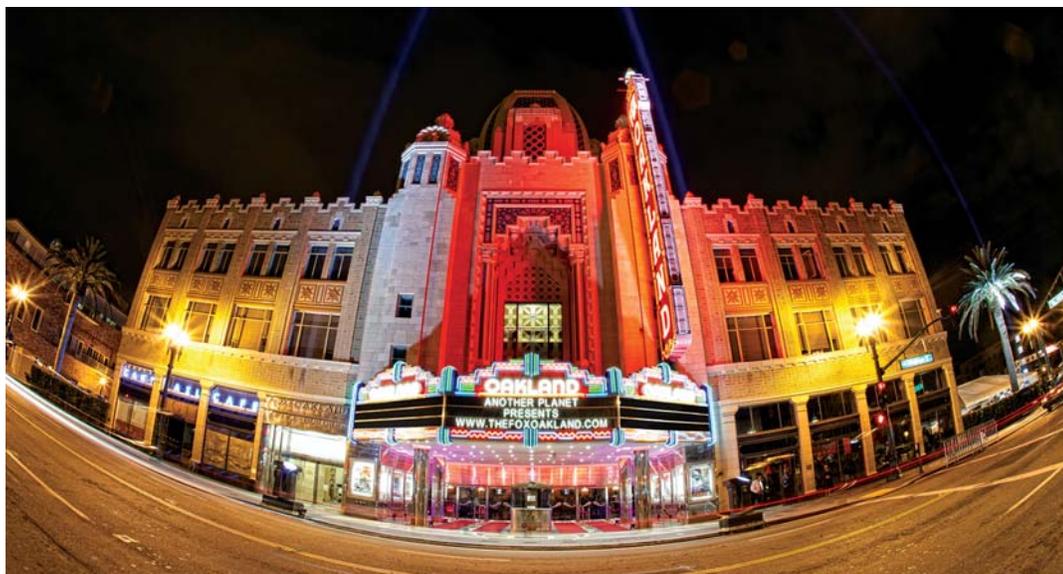
But the opportunity took some time before it was right?

I saw this theater about 25 years ago and it was boarded up and destitute. I tried to get a developer interested, a person I worked with on the Wiltern Theatre, a wonderful man named Wayne Ratkovich. He just couldn't see it at the time. It was too early to envision the future Oakland. The East Bay wasn't what it is now. When Phil Tagami approached us as well as then-Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, we jumped at the opportunity. Luckily, the bones of the theater remained intact.

Gov. Brown had this concept of 10,000 people living downtown. You needed a certain number of apartments and condos and houses, and people living there, in order for people to say, "OK, we'll bring in the high-end grocery stores, the Whole Foods. We'll bring in restaurants." Things you need for life. Whether it's a cobbler or grocery or what have you, you need people there to get businesses to go into an area.

Now they are coming to Oakland in droves. More and more

Tom Tomkinson



THE FOX THEATER OAKLAND IS A LABOR OF LOVE for Another Planet Entertainment's Gregg Perloff, and a catalyst for revitalization of the city's Uptown district.

people do not drive on a regular basis here. Driving a car is something they don't necessarily want to do, so we have a situation where companies like Lyft and Uber are very important in the Bay Area. The BART station across the street from the Fox is very convenient — nine minutes from Berkeley, 12 minutes from San Leandro and it's also 12 minutes from San Francisco.

The theater has averaged right around 92 percent sales for the entire year, an extraordinary number. We're so spoiled we sell out so many of our shows that sometimes we think it's an aberration when it's not. "What do you mean we're not sold out tonight?" The public has said they like this theater. They like going to it. The prices are reasonable, it's easy to access, the sound is incredible, the artists are amazing and we have a great staff that enjoys opening up our house to the Bay Area public.

Geographically, the Bay Area is a huge region to draw from, isn't it?

The reality is, there are more than 8 million people who live in the Bay Area, but only about

800,000 in the City and County of San Francisco. The same people come to shows, wherever they happen to be. There might be 11 percent from the South Bay/Silicon Valley area (San Jose, Palo Alto, etc.), 20 percent from the East Bay (Oakland, Berkeley, etc.), 10 percent from the North Bay (San Rafael, Santa Rosa, Napa, etc.), 15 percent from San Francisco and so on. They come from all over the San Francisco Bay Area, which comprises nine counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano and Sonoma. The only thing is, there's a bay in the middle.

Whether we do a show at the Bill Graham Civic or The Independent in San Francisco, the Fox Theater in Oakland or the Greek Theatre in Berkeley, the percentages from where the audience is drawn really stay the same. It's not like one venue is considered "a San Francisco venue" and one venue is "an Oakland/Berkeley venue."

We run theaters all over the Bay Area. We have two in San Francisco, The Independent and the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium. In the East Bay, we have the Greek

Theatre and the Fox. What's interesting, and most people don't necessarily understand if they live in Los Angeles or New York or London, is it's the Bay Area and people come to the Fox from all over the nine counties, whether a show is in Oakland or San Francisco.

But even with so many historic and popular venues in the region, the Fox Theater is special. Why?

I think one of the things that is so important to understand is that while, over the years, there have been many new theaters around the country, these older movie palaces are so special and people love going to them. The Fox has everything you want in a theater.

It's in the absolute demographic center of where people live in the Bay Area. It's across the street from the 19th Street BART station, it's four blocks from the freeway, and it's where people live.

You have the wow factor. The acoustics. The location. Perfect sight lines. The experience of the theater...and it's air conditioned! More and more, with climate change, you do need air conditioning!

But the important thing is, there's no new theater that compares to the Fox. They just don't

build them that way anymore.

The fact is, it took us three years to renovate the theater. It took 20 artisans on scaffolding for 18 months painting a 14-color ceiling by hand — that is spectacular. It was a project that was really exciting.

It was originally a movie theater, so it had reserved seats downstairs and when we decided to change that to a terraced floor, you should have seen us. There were people of different heights standing on milk crates trying to see, "Ok, can this person who is 5'5" see from behind somebody who is 6'3." We designed the theater after trying to figure out the perfect heights for the four different levels on the floor.

In restoring the Fox, we were able to put in a glycol system that you usually only see in arenas, so whether you get a beer, a soda water, or soft drink, it goes through copper plumbing and it's cold and it works well. You get a proper drink. These are systems that all had to be built. We also have an amazing Martin Mac 3 Profile automated light system that most bands either use or use to supplement their own.

We also were lucky because we worked with the historic preservation societies to keep the bones of the theater as they were, yet there was a wrap-around building to the Fox. So we were able to build new bathrooms; many more bathrooms than there were previously. It's one of the very few buildings where women don't have to wait in line and the mechanics, all the electrical, all the plumbing, had to be completely redone. And \$86 million later, we have the Fox Theater.

And that doesn't include your new sound system?

We're fortunate to have had, from the day we opened, a deal with Meyer Sound — one of the three most important sound companies in the world. They've done everything from the Montreux Jazz Festival to Dave

Matthews Band to Led Zeppelin. They happen to be located 10 blocks from the Fox Theater.

Recently, they came up with a new sound system that they have placed in the Fox. This sound system – when people say “state of the art,” *this* is state of the art. It’s the finest sound system in the world. Meyer Sound is bringing in clients from all over the world to hear this new system. We’ve had it in since Van Morrison’s shows in January, and we just did Leon Bridges. It was spectacular.

We had a great sound system before, and all of a sudden you go, “Oh my God, my ears.” The clarity and the difference in what you feel – it’s an amazing thing. We just spent over \$1.5 million on acoustics and sound. We only did this because I’m so out of my mind crazy about having the best theater in the world.

Your bookings don’t look typically like what one might expect in an ornate, restored theatre, and many could play much larger venues.

Let me read some of the acts (and remember, this is not an arena): We’ve done Kendrick Lamar, Arctic Monkeys, Prince, The Black Keys, Paul Simon, Sam Smith, Green Day, Buffalo Springfield, Lorde, The National, Skrillex, Sigur Rós, Bonnie Raitt, the xx, Lady Antebellum, Zedd, Vampire Weekend, Wilco, Mary J. Blige, Death Cab for Cutie, Zac Brown, D’Angelo and the Vanguard, Jack Johnson, My Morning Jacket, Lenny Kravitz, Kraftwerk, B.B. King, Chvrches, Ray LaMontagne, The Allman Brothers Band, Pretty Lights, David Byrne, St. Vincent, Mark Knopfler. I could go on and on.

Think about that. To have a list of artists like that who have played the theater because they’ve heard amazing things about it. We have had so many touring and production managers say, “If all theaters and promoters had the amenities

you have at the Fox, we wouldn’t need a rider.” Once touring crews go in and have a chance to see it, they don’t say, “Oh these dressing rooms are horrible or there’s not the right number of bathrooms.”

As part of the restoration – because the theater had never been built for concerts – we went into an empty basement space and built all the dressing rooms and all the elevators, put 4-foot-wide doors into the dressing rooms so road boxes could easily get in.

Many artists who have played the Fox have said, often times from stage, that they think this is not just the best theater in the United States, but the best theater in the *world!* How do you think that makes me feel? It’s pretty neat.

And obviously, the presence of a busy and full venue benefits surrounding businesses and neighborhoods.

We have students from the Oakland School of the Arts doing their major productions in the theater. We’ve had student interns as part of the stage crew. There are so many wonderful transformative things that go on around the theater. We just had Kehlani headline there for two sold-out nights, who just graduated from the school.

There’s a four-star hotel going in across the street right now. We’ve got over 30 restaurants in four blocks that have gone into the neighborhood. More than 25 bars. We’ve done a sponsorship with BART where they gave out passes so that people could take BART to the theater, which is the green way to go.

There is a restaurant across the street called Flora, which is closed on Sundays and Mondays. They realized when we had a show one of those nights, it was worth it to open. So they open if we have a show.

You realize that there are impacts on people’s lives, that when we put on a show people have to get babysitters, figure out where they’re going to eat.

Courtesy Another Planet Entertainment



THE ELABORATE LOBBY of the Fox Theater Oakland is lovingly restored, with many of the intricate details painted by hand.

There’s so many different elements in people’s lives. And when they choose to spend their discretionary income with us, rather than going to a baseball game, or a basketball game, or to the movies – what with the cost of concert tickets, everything has to be perfect.

You don’t want to have lines. You want people to want to come back. I read interviews about how people only go once or twice a year to concerts and I scratch my head because I know at Another Planet venues, so many people attend from eight to 15 shows of ours a year. Some go even more.

Does your business model attribute to that high annual average?

People who go to Another Planet Entertainment shows know that we don’t broker tickets, we don’t play in the secondary ticket market, have never discounted a ticket or papered a house. If we say the ticket price is \$35, people know the ticket price is \$35. They rush out to buy tickets because they know the tickets are going to sell out but they also know they’re not going to feel like an idiot because suddenly the ticket price has changed.

We’re not in the airline business. The price doesn’t go up; the price doesn’t go down. Our business model is quite a bit different from many others. And I’m not knocking anyone else. It’s very important to understand that our business model is ours. Other people have every right to do business the way they want. Other people would think we are out of our minds, or on another planet, not to play in the secondary market.

It’s funny. The Fox Theater, whether general admission or reserved, has audiences that are predominately ages 20-27 and other shows that average around 50 years of age. Obviously we have shows for different audiences, from Van Morrison or Paul Simon to when you are doing The 1975 or Kendrick Lamar.

But if it’s easy to get there, or easy to park – all of those things go into theater development and back to my city planning roots. The hardest thing in our business is to get someone to go to a theater for the first time. It really is. Once you get them to go, and they know where to get off BART, or know where to park, or ease the anxiety they might have, if they have a good experience, they’ll keep coming back.

Deborah Speer