

MIAMI BEACH

RETURN OF A THEATER

THE LITTLE STAGE THEATER IS ONCE AGAIN ALIVE WITH MUSIC AND THEATRICALS AFTER A CITY-FUNDED RENOVATION. SOBE INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS HOPES THE FACILITY WILL HELP CREATE AN EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS FOR THE ARTS

BY DAVID SMILEY

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It was a decade to forget for the Little Stage Theater.

Throughout the 2000s, as arts programs blossomed next door and around the surrounding Collins Park neighborhood, the quaint but downtrodden venue remained shuttered.

The building, according to Miami Beach city spokeswoman Ivette Diaz, was closed for at least 10 consecutive years — until Jan. 1, 2010.

On the first night of the new decade, candlelight flickered atop small, packed tables inside the dark interior of the intimate venue. Laughter and song echoed and spilled outdoors. And a historic complex in the heart of a cultural district came to life once again, courtesy of the SoBe Institute of the Arts and the city.

"This is a story of putting this facility back on the map and using arts to breathe fresh ideas and energy into that part of the district," said Mark Needle, board chairman for SoBe Arts, which is managing the theater and adjacent clubhouse.

The evening's performance, Grand Opening Cabaret, was made possible by some \$35,000 in renovations to the theater funded by the city in 2009. Another six shows will be held Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through on Jan. 17.

The show began with a sampling of the Tunes 'N Toons act that SoBe Arts brought to Sleepless Night, Miami Beach's all night cultural extravaganza. The evening's first act featured a cartoon and real life Betty Boop

If you go

- What: SoBe Arts' Grand Opening Cabaret.
- Where: Little Stage Theater, 2100 Washington Ave., Miami Beach.
- When: 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 7 p.m. Sunday, through Jan. 17.
- Cost: \$10 general seating, \$25 premium seating.
- Information: 305-674-9220.

doing a sultry number to the sounds of a live jazz combo.

Throughout the evenings' final two acts, the jazz continued as four SoBe Arts actors crooned musical numbers and riffed on a theme of unrequited love during loosely organized skits and songs placed in seemingly random fashion throughout the theater.

For the city, the opening of the Little Stage Theater, also known as Acorn Theater, is a sign that its renovated 21st Street Community Center is, once again, a welcoming venue to the community.

And for the young SoBe Arts, the theater's opening is another step in an ambitious goal to create a top-notch cultural and educational institution and performance complex.

Now in its fourth year, SoBe Arts began as a musical education group and started to expand when it signed an agreement with the city to use the Carl Fisher Clubhouse in 2007. The group has recently included



PHOTOS BY DANIEL BOCK/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

GRAND OPENING: Ivette Viñas and Philip de la Cal perform during the Grand Opening Cabaret at the Little Stage Theater in Miami Beach.

dance and theater classes and performances.

Kievman, who plays host during the ongoing show, said that as of early 2010, the nonprofit was offering courses to about 200 students on a budget of about \$200,000.

"As we develop this institute, we don't know exactly where this will end up," he said Saturday. "I have a vision of creating a Juilliard-level arts institute of the south. We may or may not get to that point."

The Grand Opening Cabaret is scheduled the next two weekends. Other shows, including Music & Shakespeare and Art of Transcendence productions, are to take place later this year. Kievman said the theater is also open for groups wishing to rent the venue and will host performances by students of SoBe Arts.



HISTORICAL EVENING: Montserrat Franco was also a performer during the Little Stage Theater in Miami Beach's Grand Opening Cabaret. The event was presented by the SoBe Institute of the Arts and was a celebration of the renovation and reopening of the theater after at least a decade of being closed. Those involved are hoping to restore to theater to its old luster.