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Bass Concert Hall

Extreme Makeover, PAC Edition

By Robert Faires

For nearly three years, there's been talk about Bass Concert Hall shutting down for 18 months to bring the 1981 venue up to 21st-century code with \$7.6 million in fire and safety improvements. But last month, the UT Board of Regents upgraded the upgrade to a full-blown renovation of the 3,000-seat hall, approving \$14.7 million for a makeover that will give the aging brown-brick theatre a glassy new face and internal enhancements in everything from sound to concessions to restrooms. The plans come from BOORA Architects of Portland, Ore., which has been at work on the project since 2003. Firm principal Stan Boles specializes in cultural-arts facilities and has worked extensively on university campuses; plus, he just happens to be a UT grad, which makes him more than usually well-suited to this project. What he and BOORA envision for Bass is bumping out its front several feet and encasing it in a five-story glass and steel structure, creating an expanded, more light-filled lobby and atrium. Restrooms, particularly those for women, will be enlarged and improved; concessions will be reconfigured; and facilities will be added that will allow patrons to actually dine in the hall before events. The interior of the hall will see new seating and flooring, more lighting with a new grid in front of the stage, new sidewalls, a forestage canopy and new stage cheek walls to help with sound projection, and new acoustical curtains that can be adjusted for different kinds of events so that sound can be distributed more evenly throughout the hall no matter who's on stage.

As previously noted, Bass is scheduled to close in May 2007, at the conclusion of the Performing Arts Center's 25th anniversary season, and reopen sometime in the fall of 2008. While construction is under way, the UT PAC will have to scale back the number of supersize bookings, such as the Broadway in Austin megamusicals and top-draw pop and comedy acts, but it will continue to program full seasons, making more use of its other venues: Hogg Auditorium, Bates Recital Hall, and the B. Iden Payne and McCullough theatres. According to PAC Director Pebbles Wadsworth, the Bass renovation "is just the beginning of what's to come." A promised "big picture" announcement is said to show Austin "firsthand the university's continuing commitment to the arts and the Performing Arts Center's vision for the future." For more information, visit www.utpac.org.

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