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Bass Concert Hall: Renovation elaboration

By Robert Faires

Bass Concert Hall still has seven months to go before that year-and-a-half-long shutdown for a long-overdue upgrade, but the folks at the UT Performing Arts Center have already started talking it up in a big way. At a press conference Oct. 13, PAC director Pebbles Wadsworth and College of Fine Arts Interim Dean Doug Dempster unveiled new images of Bass as it will look following its UT Regents-approved \$14.7 million makeover and discussed how the 3,000-seat facility will be improved, as well as what the PAC will be up to in the 18 months that Bass is dark. Regarding the hall itself, the images and descriptions were in line with those released in May: enlarged lobby and atrium spaces enclosed in a new five-story glass front; expanded concessions areas, including a cafe; and copious improvements to the auditorium, particularly in the area of acoustics, which have been a sore point at Bass almost since it opened. (New acoustical curtains that can be adjusted should help to distribute the sound more evenly throughout the hall whatever type of act is on stage.) As for the PAC, it will offer no packaged season of events for 2007-2008 or fall '08, so no *Seinfelds*, no *Arethas*, no *Lion Kings* for 18 months, just a smattering of events suited to the center's other, smaller venues: Hogg Auditorium, Bates Recital Hall, and the B. Iden Payne and McCullough theatres. Wadsworth considers the Bass closure an opportunity for the PAC to focus more attention on its educational mission and Department of Theatre & Dance productions, and both she and Dempster commented on the 18-month "downtime" being used by PAC staff for planning and refining the center's goals. That staff, it turns out, will be smaller by 10 people during the Bass upgrade. That's how many full-time employees are being laid off once the hall shuts down in May. But even as it's scaling back operations, the PAC is ramping up fundraising – not for the building, which is covered by \$9 million from the university and a \$5.7 million bond secured by the PAC, but for its endowment, which subsidizes education and outreach, as well as programming, and which the center wants to boost by \$10 million. For more information, visit www.utpac.org.

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