

ATC offers tours of Temple of Music and Art

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David Ira Goldstein has been artistic director of the Arizona Theatre Company for 20 years. But the ATC's Jewish legacy in Tucson goes back much further — all the way to the founding of the ATC's Tucson home, the Temple of Music and Art, by Madeline Dreyfus Heineman Berger, who started the Saturday Morning Music Club in the first decade of the 1900s after moving to Tucson from Los Angeles. In 1927, with financial backing from the brother of her second husband, Harry Berger, she opened the Temple of Music and Art. Violinist Jascha Heifetz performed at the grand opening.

After Berger's death in 1943, the building passed through several hands before being renovated and rededicated in 1990. It is now owned by the City of Tucson, which leases the facility to ATC.

Goldstein notes that the founder of ATC, now in its 45th year, was Sandy Rosenthal, who was also Jewish. One of Rosenthal's most successful productions, says Goldstein, was "The Dybbuk," originally a Yiddish play. Although clearly not a Jewish theater company, says Goldstein, ATC often stages plays with Jewish themes, from last year's "Lost in Yonkers" to "Red," about artist Mark Rothko, coming in April.

After 20 years at ATC, Goldstein, who divides his time between Tucson and Phoenix, where ATC also presents its season, says he believes that support from the Jewish communities in both cities — both as attendees and financial backers — has been a key to the theatre's success.

"At its base, theatre is an art that is one of ideas, language and human compassion,"



Photo courtesy Tucson Citizen

Madeline Dreyfus Heineman Berger, founder of the Temple of Music and Art

says Goldstein, "and all three of those things are embraced by our faith. It makes sense that Jews have always been very involved in the theater, whether it's in Tucson or New York, or even going back to the roots of the Yiddish theater."

Tucsonan Rob Glaser, current president of the ATC board of directors, echoes that sentiment, recalling frequent trips with his parents to see plays in New York as a child. "It had a profound impact on my life," he says, injecting an element of culture that he didn't get in his Westchester neighborhood or at school.

The ATC will hold tours of the historic Temple of Music and Art — where a portrait of Berger holds pride of place in the lobby — on Dec. 3 and 17, Jan. 21, Feb. 4 and 18, March 3 and 17 and April 14. The tours will begin at 11:30 a.m. in the courtyard and last about one hour. Docents will discuss the history of the building, its restoration and renovation, and take visitors on a backstage tour. Reservations are required; contact Don Gest at 884-8210, ext. 8610.

