

Published October 27th, 2021

A ghostly presence or two at Lafayette's Town Hall Theatre?

By Vera Kochan



An orb hovers over the stage as something bright white spills over the back of a seat at THT. Photo Vera Kochan

Most playhouse theatres can be spooky enough during the day, but at night with all manner of bizarre props and human-like mannequins as part of the normal backstage décor, anyone with an active imagination could easily become startled. Add to the mix, the month of October with Halloween on the horizon, and the hackles are bound to go up on the necks of even the most stalwart of ghost skeptics.

Most, if not all, theatres follow the custom of a ghost light. "A ghost light is a single bulb left burning whenever a theatre is dark," according to an article in Playbill. "Some argue that its function is to chase away mischievous spirits; others insist it lights the way for the ghosts that are said to inhabit virtually every theatre, keeping them happy and contented. Either way, that light ensures that no one takes an accidental tumble off the stage."

Lafayette's Town Hall Theatre building was built in 1914 and initially used for dinner/dance parties. Between 1941-1945 it was used as World War II troop barracks.

It wasn't until 1947 when its first incarnation as a theatre began. That's over 100 years of active history and enough people passing through to make one or two want to linger for an eternity.

THT Managing Director Dennis Markam believes there are two spirits haunting the building. One is a male and the other a female. "Down in the lobby, in front of the bar, there's often a cold spot. It feels like it's female. Other staff members have felt things, but nothing specific. We also have lights and fuse boxes that seem to have a mind of their own."

Markam recalled one incident several years ago when a teacher brought her young students over to the theatre to rehearse for a show. They were alone in the building. During the process of positioning the youngsters on the stage, one of the children pointed toward the technical booth at the back of the theatre and asked, "Whose the man in there?" Knowing that they were alone, the teacher didn't want to take a look. Staff decided it was the ghost of Carl Rasmussen, the theatre's art director in the 1950s. His picture now hangs above the booth. For years an old technical director would always talk to the departed Rasmussen and include him in the daily workings of the playhouse.

With Town Hall Theatre's decades of success, and survival through COVID mandates, it would seem that the ghosts are keeping a benevolent eye on things. "Even if after-hours lighting weren't required for safety purposes, superstitious thespians would probably still insist on keeping the ghost light burning," stated Playbill. "After all, the business of theatre is risky enough without an irate spirit or two in the wings."

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA