



Thern Helps Caba Theatre Students Learn The Ropes

Situated on the sprawling 50-acre Hendrix College campus in Conway, Arkansas, the 242-seat Caba Theatre is considered to be one of the premier performing art centers in the region. Home to the Hendrix Players and host to a variety of student performances, production training and Hendrix dance ensemble, Caba Theatre is once again preparing to take center stage. Recent renovations and upgraded stage equipment, has helped Caba Theatre improve safety, production ability and student training for the entire Hendrix theatre arts department.

A quick look at the genesis of Caba Theatre takes us back to the mid 1970's when the C.L. Caba Family made a considerable donation to the school for the expansion of its campus and facilities. In fact, the Caba Family gave the school the largest donation in its history, \$3,250,000. Most of the donation went to an endowment, however enough was set aside to finance construction of Caba Theatre, aptly named after the family who made the performing art center a reality.

Opening its doors in October of 1977, the theatre was built to be one of the most technically advanced theatres for its time, featuring a thrust-stage with a pneumatic turntable, a computerized lighting system, a four-channel sound system and the only revolving stage in the state.

Being the region's top venue wasn't the only reason Caba Theatre drew large crowds. Rumor has it that as part of the donation agreement between Hendrix College and the Caba Family, admissions for events were free of charge. This stipulation in the contract wasn't just for theatre performances; their deal ran the gamut of events, which included all plays,



recitals and events held at Caba. Even to this day, all Hendrix College campus events are free of charge.

Even with large crowds and stunning performances, years passed and time aged the theatre. As with any facility time plays a major role in its stage life and by the year 2000, Caba theatre was in desperate need of renovations. Hendrix College realized that in order to continue the theatre's legacy they needed to give the theatre a facelift. They needed new equipment and renovations to take place in order to maintain the theatre and restore it to the prestigious performing arts center of the past.

The renovations finally came after a three-year process and got underway in 2002. For the project the theatre arts department worked closely with the help of Andy Gibbs, chair of the theatre arts department at the University of Arkansas. Mr. Gibbs was there to determine what renovations were needed and what equipment they needed to purchase.





The theatre at Arkansas University was recently renovated, which gave Mr. Gibbs a wealth of first-hand knowledge to assist Hendrix with Cabe Theatre. “We were fortunate that he was able to help us,” says Professor Danny Grace, professor of theatre arts and department chair at Hendrix College.

Based on Mr. Gibbs initial recommendations that safety concerns come first, changes to Cabe Theatre included the replacement of all rigging in the upstage area and the addition of a new dark blue act curtain. Along with a new system of traveler tracks upstage, gave the crews more flexibility in presenting plays.

The school also invested in new equipment that would be used to assist in stage production. The new equipment purchased included one of Thern’s Series CW-2500 clew winches. Thern’s manually operated clew winch was easily installed and provided the stagehands with economical and dependable control of multi-line loads. In most theatre applications Thern’s clew winches are used to raise and lower scenery and lighting battens, however at the Cabe Theatre, stagehands use the winch to fly the grand teaser. The teaser is a horizontal drape used to hide the most downstage electric where the main lighting instruments are located.

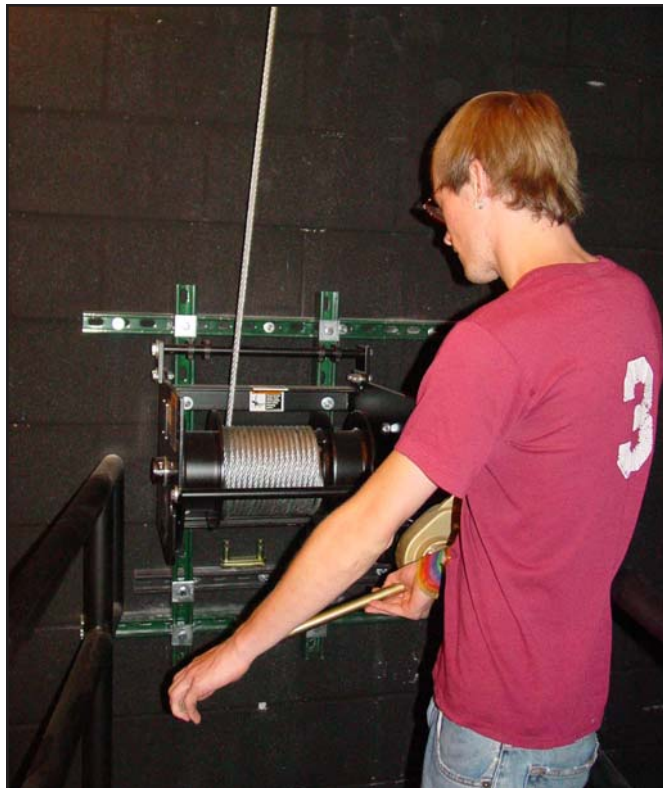
The new multi-line winch at Cabe features load holding brakes for positive load control, a lock-out pin that provides secondary load holding and prevents unauthorized use. Stagehands operate the winch either by hand or by utilizing its hex drive input with assistance from a large drill motor. This new industry designed winch gives students the opportunity to learn how to trim the teaser to appropriate lengths.

Other revamps to Cabe included removal of the original fly system. “Over the years it had just become too unsafe to utilize,” says Professor Grace.

“We also replaced the five hand winch lines with a catwalk position, a dead hung act curtain, a teaser winch, a dead hung sky drop traveler and a dead hung black traveler.” Professor Grace also mentioned that along with the new installation they needed to add side traveler legs stage right and stage left.

By mimicking the existing catwalk, the new rigging system will allow safer access to the area above the stage. The rigging is used for lights and to raise and lower the scenery. Students now have access to areas of the stage where previously they were not allowed.

The new rigging set up for Cabe gave the students a greater learning opportunity. Before renovations were complete and new equipment added, any work



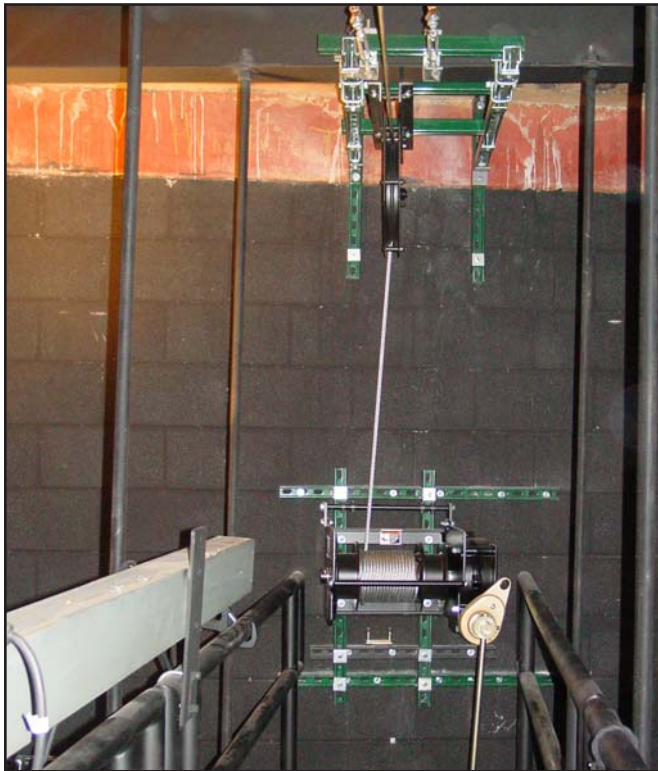
A student operates one of the new Thern CW-2500 clew winches installed at the theatre.





that needed to be done in the upstage area was off limits to students because it was all done on ladders and lifts. “It was simply too dangerous and a big liability,” says Grace. “However with the new system in place students have access to the upstage area, which offers them more training possibilities.”

“This kind of experience is important for a well-rounded theatre arts student,” Grace notes. “The completed renovations give students full access to rear lighting positions and rigging possibilities off the catwalk.” Yet another skill students at Hendrix can add to their theatre production resume.



A new clew winches installed at Cabe Theatre. Innovative design allows the unit to be drill driven.

A majority of productions at Cabe are put on by the Hendrix Players. The “Players,” are a body of students and faculty who participate in the production of plays, dance and other theatrical activities at Hendrix College. Their creed, “Once a Hendrix

Player always a Hendrix Player.” The group is open to all Hendrix students regardless of their area of study, which makes their program so dynamic. According to the group, approximately ten percent of the student body participates on an annual basis. Many group members also go on to participate and work at all levels of the performing arts world in the U.S. and abroad.

This season the Cabe Theatre will put their new equipment to use with a production of *Landscape of the Body* by John Guare and additional plans are underway for the production of a musical. The senior seminar class is also creating a production for course credit. The theatre arts department has lined up plans to create a fall dance project using one of the dance workshop situations. All followed by a spring dance performance by the Hendrix Dance Ensemble.

Changes don’t stop there for Cabe Theatre, in fact Professor Grace and his Hendrix Player’s are hoping to make additional equipment changes in the not too distant future. Seating, carpeting as well as refurbishing the stage itself are all on Professor Grace’s to-do list. “We would really like to see a total renovation of the theatre,” says Grace. “Getting the theatre completely up-to-date would not only add to the production value and performances by the players but it would also give students opportunities to safely learn all the intricacies of a modern day production.”

