

Chapter 01 – Introduction

Announcer: The Mayo family is a distinguished Tulsa family, known for several downtown Tulsa real estate properties. The Mayo family was responsible for building the Petroleum Building, the Mayo Building, the Mayo Hotel, and the adjacent Mayo Motor Inn parking garage.

Today, a fourth-generation Mayo family member, Peter Mayo, follows this heritage in restoring and improving Tulsa's former Municipal Theatre, once known as the Brady Theater and now called the Tulsa Theatre.

In 1925, Peter's Grandfather, John, and his brother Cass Mayo completed construction of the hotel that would become a destination for many notable guests throughout its first life, including President John F. Kennedy, Babe Ruth, and Elvis Presley.

The Tulsa Municipal Theater was completed in 1914 and remodeled in 1930 and 1952. It was one of only 16 theatres in the U.S. equipped to host a full Metropolitan Opera production and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

When the Tulsa Performing Arts Center was built, the city put the old theatre up for auction in 1977. Peter bought the theater for \$35,000, saved it from demolition, and made major improvements to what was once known as the "Ole Lady on Brady."

Peter's parents, Alene Oliphant Mayo and John Burch Mayo were prominent in the Tulsa community, promoting many good causes, including the Tulsa Symphony and opera productions at the Municipal Theatre. Burch was known for his operatic voice. So, when the Mayo name became attached to the theatre, it seemed only fitting.

In Peter's oral history, he talks about his musical background, how he came to buy the theatre, the many concerts during his ownership, and he tells about

the legend of Enrico Caruso on the oral history website and podcast VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 – 13:05

Mother and Father

John Erling (JE): You're listening to the piano stylings of Peter Mayo. Peter, you've been playing the piano since how old?

Peter Mayo (PM): Well, I started as a teenager. My parents had a baby grand in the living room, which they had inherited from my grandmother, Lillian. And my brother and I, we would listen to rock and roll records and sit down at the piano. And there'd be a small, you know, little stereo system we'd carry around with us and set it up. And we'd try to figure out the chords that were being used in the rock and roll songs. If I recall, Louie Louie was one of the ones that musicians of our era, we usually started with that song. Because it was pretty easy. It was three chords.

JE: But you don't play by notes.

PM: I can't read. I cannot formally read music. That's correct.

JE: So this is all by ear, as we say.

PM: A lot of rock musicians play by ear. That's not something unique to me, but yes.

JE: Well, today's date is November 14th, 2023. Peter, would you state your full name, please?

PM: Peter Oliphant Mayo.

JE: And where are we recording this interview?

PM: We are at my rehearsal studio at 112 West Cameron. In Tulsa.

JE: Which is not too far from a very famous building.

PM: Correct.

JE: Called?

PM: Now it's called Tulsa Theatre, or The Tulsa Theatre. It was Brady Theatre. Before that, it was Tulsa Municipal Theatre. And before that, it was Tulsa Convention Hall. It's had four or five names.

JE: And we're going to get into that. Where were you born?

PM: In Tulsa, at St. John's.

JE: State your date of birth.

PM: 6-9-52.

JE: Making your present age?

PM: 71.

JE: Let's talk about your mother. Your mother's name, maiden name, where she was born, that type of thing.

PM: Okay. Maiden name was Allene Oliphant. And she was born in Tulsa, probably at St. John's.

JE: And she grew up in Tulsa then?

PM: Right.

JE: All right. I've got to go back and ask about Oliphant.

PM: Okay. That's an important name. All names are important. But there's an interesting history to that name.

PM: Right.

JE: Tell us about it.

PM: Well, her father, A.G. Oliphant, he became a successful oil and gas person in Osage County, mainly. Out of the Pawhuska area was where he got his start. And he was able to get some leases early on. There's an article in it that someone found out. It was a man down from the Tulsa world that mentioned his name as curiously that he was able to obtain some leases right around the Burbank Field, right as the Burbank Field became a big oil discovery in Osage. And that was the start of his business.

And my mother grew up in a house in Maple Ridge. And A.G. Oliphant, he was generous. He gave them money for a couple of buildings at TU, University of Tulsa. And he didn't live that long. I only knew him, I think he probably passed when I was around 14 years old. So I didn't really get to know him very well.

Santa Fe was one of their great loves. That started with A.G. And so my mother spent summers in Santa Fe.

JE: A.G.?

PM: A.G. Oliphant, that's her dad. Alan Green Oliphant. And that became a passion and a love of my mother. And she brought a lot of that architecture back to her house here in Tulsa. In fact, she remodeled two rooms of the house to have Santa Fe styling. And she would go out there and find little knickknacks and pieces and doors and things like that. And bring them back.

JE: So you spent time out there.

PM: Right. And we would spend maybe a month out of the summer as children. We would spend out there. Great memories there. And I still will visit Santa Fe. I love the place. When she was growing up, it probably was not nearly as commercial or touristy as it is now. You kind of had to know about it then. It was probably kind of a best-kept secret.

JE: So her personality, what was it like?

PM: Well, she was very nurturing to my brother and me.

JE: And your brother's name?

PM: Dan. John Daniel Mayo II. He was named after my grandfather on my dad's side. She was very giving. One of her theories was that she wanted to make the house comfortable for my brother and me. And our friends. And it became kind of the hangout in the neighborhood. Her theory was, let's make it attractive so you guys will want to spend time here.

And hopefully we'll keep you off the streets and maybe getting into trouble. And it did work. All my friends loved her. It became kind of the hangout. She allowed us to have musical instruments. Drums and guitars and things that make noise. And she put up with it. Just so that we would feel comfortable at the house. Which also played right into the 60's music scene and how all the young people were so enamored with that music scene. My friends included.

JE: But your mother was very active in events and social events.

PM: Right. She had done some amateur modeling. And so there's some pictures of her that I brought. And you took some photos of her.

JE: And I've just seen that. And she's a beautiful woman.

PM: Well, thank you. I don't know that I received all that from her. But we'll take it where we can get it.

JE: But she was involved in the community, wasn't she?

PM: Well, so my dad was basically, he and Herb Gussman put together the Tulsa Philharmonic. They were the instigators of that. And of course, they had to raise money for it. So every year there was the Cinderella Ball, which was probably one of the first gala fundraisers in Tulsa. Certainly one of the first. And so she was often the chairperson of that.

And he, you know, he being the president of the Philharmonic, they would

tie the two things together. Fundraising. Fundraising. And helping the Philharmonic. She also helped other organizations. She was a big spokesman for mental health in Oklahoma. She volunteered at Children's Medical Center. And Tulsa Garden Center was something that she was passionate about. It was evident by looking around her house that she loved growing things.

The wisteria vines were just out of control all around the exterior of the house. But they were beautiful. And she would volunteer for some of these organizations and give her time. Something interesting about her name, Allene, it's kind of an unusual name. Not a very common name even then. And my aunt on the Oliphant side of the family, Arlene Oliphant. So it was kind of uncommon that we had Allene. We had Arlene Oliphant.

We had Arlene Oliphant. And then my dad's aunt was named Allene. And it just isn't that common. I know there's that pop song, Come On, Eileen. So that was interesting because when my brother and I would answer the phone at the house, a lot of times, you know, we didn't have the internet. You didn't have texting or any of that.

So people that would try to get in touch with her would have to call. You know, what a concept. You had to call. And so we would answer the phone, hello, and they'd say, "is Eileen there?" And so this became kind of a running joke. It was, well, no, "her name's not Eileen. It's Allene."

Neither name is very common. But it's spelled A-L-L-E-N-E as opposed to A-I-L-E-N-E. But she didn't like the name Eileen. Oh, it would irritate her. So most of the time, she would want to call. She would want to correct the people. "Oh, Eileen, it's so nice to talk to you." Oh, it would make her cringe. Yeah. She's not fond of the name Eileen. And then, again, unusual that my father's aunt was named Allene. Yeah. So he had two Allenes in his life.

JE: How old was your mother when she died?

PM: 72, excuse me, 73. She was born in 1923.

JE: Mm-hmm. But that was a big funeral here.

PM: Well, we did it at TU because of her family association with TU, the chapel there. You know, it's kind of interesting, John, when your parents get older and maybe they outlive some of their friends, that you might think that these prominent people would have hundreds of people showing up at the funeral.

JE: Yeah.

PM: And it's not always the case.

JE: Right.

PM: But the people who were there were people who loved her.

JE: Then your father's name?

PM: John Birch Mayo.

JE: And where was he from? Where was he born?

PM: He was born also here in Tulsa in 1919.

JE: So then his personality?

PM: More gregarious, outgoing. He liked to kind of be the center of a party. And people loved him for that. He could do imitations of Winston Churchill, and he could do imitations of President Roosevelt. And of course, you know, that generation, as Tom Brokaw called it, the greatest generation, most of his friends participated in World War II.

JE: What did he do for a living?

PM: Well, he started, his father, John Mayo, and his two brothers built the Mayo Hotel. They had had a furniture business prior to that. And they immediately put my dad in the hotel, you know, working as a clerk or something down on the floor of the hotel. And then he went to Cornell Hotel School to learn the trade. More formally. So he would have been probably 19 years old when he did that.

JE: So then did he manage the hotel? Was that his?

PM: Well, no, John Mayo, his dad, he was the manager.

Chapter 03 – 9:40 Patton and Hemingway

John Erling (JE): Well, then let's go back to your grandfather, John, and his brother.

Peter Mayo (PM): He had two brothers, Haskell and Cass Allen.

JE: Now, they came to Tulsa, I believe, in 1904.

PM: Something like that.

JE: And I have it here on a loan from their grandmother.

PM: Okay.

JE: \$300 to start a retail furniture store.

PM: Okay. That's good information. Okay. Okay. So, in those days, a furniture store also made coffins. That was part of what a furniture store did. So, they were doing both. They were supplying the undertakers with coffins, and then that was the beginning of Mayo Furniture Company.

JE: Right. And so, then the furniture store had grown to a point where they could actually build a building there as a retail furniture store. And the lower two floors were for their furniture business, upper stores for oil company space. Is that true?

PM: That sounds right. You have good information, John.

JE: And then we have the Glenpool Oil Strike, with more growth for Tulsa, which allowed the brothers to add five more floors for their building. By 1917, they doubled the height of the building to 10 stories.

PM: That sounds accurate. Yes.

JE: And then the Mayo Hotel. The Mayo Hotel, then, was built by your father and your, I mean, by your grandfather, and by Cass.

PM: Yes.

JE: Financed the building for the hotel, built in 1925. Right. And that's my background story. I expect more from you, but I just thought I'd fill that in right here.

PM: You do good research, John.

JE: And the rich and the famous would stay in that hotel.

PM: Well, and Grandfather John Mayo, he liked it. He was taking trips to New York and was always enamored by the architecture there. And he tried to employ an architect who could simulate the look of a New York City building. When they, a lot of limestone and the brick, brick and limestone architectural design. In fact, you know, I even have some of the old plans, and it's interesting to go back and look at those.

JE: Did you ever know him, see him, your grandfather?

PM: Yes. Well, he died when I was about 14, but prior to that, yes. We would go on Sundays up to his apartment at the Mayo. And things seemed more formal in those days. You know, we would be dressed up for Sunday and after church, and we would go out. I think it was the 17th. It was the 17th floor. It was the southwest corner. It was a large suite that John and Lillian had. Beautiful.

Though I do have those memories of going. And he would also sometimes, I do remember that we were old enough. He may have been, I may have been 15 or 16 when he passed. But he would allow us to come down on

weekends and stay in a room there and kind of run around the place. So, as young teenagers, I have some great memories doing that.

JE: J. Paul Getty lived there. Is that true?

PM: That's correct. Now, I don't have too many stories. I wish my father could have related some of those stories because he would have known all of them. It wasn't just J. Paul Getty. Like you said, there were lots of celebrities that came and went.

JE: President John Kennedy, Bob Hope, Charles Lindbergh, Babe Ruth, Will Rogers all stayed there.

PM: Elvis. Elvis. Yeah. When he was here, what, two or three, I believe, yeah.

JE: And here's a note that I have. In 1951, the hotel was segregated.

PM: Wow.

JE: Until Harry Truman phoned the hotel and wanted his daughter Margaret to bring along her black maid. And yes, she could come to the hotel, but the maid was required to use the service elevator.

PM: Oh, boy.

JE: Yeah. And, of course, in that time period, that was not just unique. To that hotel, that was Tulsa.

PM: Did John Mayo make an exception? Or did, you'd probably know.

JE: It didn't say that. It didn't, but. Right. Then they have other, the Petroleum Building, they built that too, didn't they?

PM: I believe so.

JE: Any more remembrances of his brother Cass too, or your grandfather John?

PM: I don't really remember Cass or Haskell. I believe Haskell was bought out fairly. It was early, and it was just John and Cass Allen who were the owners. And I believe John Mayo eventually bought out Cass Allen in the later years of ownership. I believe it was sold in 68 or 69.

JE: So I'm thinking out of those families and then coming down to your father, you've got a bunch of cousins around, don't you?

PM: Well, not a whole lot, but yeah. Yes.

JE: And they're living in Tulsa?

PM: Yes.

JE: Your father, Birch, I know, told you many stories about your grandfather. Tell us about Ernest Hemingway and why that's an interesting story here.

PM: Okay. That story I know fairly well, because my father would tell it to me. So he went to hotel school at Cornell. And then his parents told him that there was war coming. And that he needed to get his ROTC officer's training so that when he went to war, he would go in as an officer. So he did that at Cornell and then trained at Camp Huachuca, I believe that's how you say it, in Arizona, where he apparently was promoted.

And I don't know exactly, but somehow they got him into the entourage of General Patton, during the invasion of Normandy. I mean, he was stationed in England first. And when the invasion of Normandy happened, Patton and his entourage came in probably on the third or fourth wave.

Still dangerous, but most of it had been cleared by those first deadly invasions. And because of his background in hospitality, he was able to go to the hotel school that he was assigned to acquire lodgings as Patton and his entourage progressed east across France. They would send him and a few soldiers ahead to get accommodations for the next camping area. And he loved telling the stories about that.

And Ernest Hemingway was assigned as a reporter. I believe for Washington Post, you might be able to check that out. You know, as a, you

know, war reporter assigned to General Patton and his entourage. And it wasn't that big of an entourage. You know, I'm going to guess a few hundred soldiers. But the people right around Patton was probably about 50 people.

So my father was able to get to know most of them. And he got to know Ernest Hemingway. And he would tell one story about Hemingway where he was a fan of guns. But as a civilian, he could not carry a gun during the war. And there were strict rules about that. But the story my dad told was that one day Hemingwood – and Hemingway and one of the soldiers that my father knew, they both got guns. And they went out just kind of. On patrol, which again, was very much against the rules. And the story my father told was when they came back, the soldier that Hemingway had gone out with was wounded and had to go to the hospital.

And Patton came into the hospital later and told the soldier, “you son of a blank,” as if he was really mad at him and then said, “you're going to get the Purple Heart for this.” So that was kind of the joke. There was a court-martial about it. And no one was found guilty of anything because it's a war zone. And they've got other things more important to do.

But that was an interesting story. Yes. And then my dad and my mom were able to keep the relationship with Hemingway going after the war. And they would visit him several times.

JE: He lived in Key West. Would they have gone down there probably to see him?

PM: He went there and Hemingway liked going to Cuba. And so they met him down there one time.

JE: Wow.

Chapter 04 – 6:30
Lawrence Tibbett

Peter Mayo (PM): My dad's best friend was Lawrence Tibbett after the war

John Erling (JE): And what about Lawrence?

PM: Okay. So, when they came over after the World War II was over, they put all the troops on a troop ship. And most of them came into New York Harbor. And everybody was ready to party. So, they let them out. And most of the soldiers stayed in New York Harbor.

They stayed in New York for a while. My dad being one of them. And he didn't want to come back to Tulsa. He got a job at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City. He was a manager there. He had the credentials of having studied at the hotel school at Cornell.

So, that's why he was able to get that job. And he was an amateur opera singer, my dad. So, he would go to the Met, which was one of the finest opera companies in the world. To see the shows there. And I don't know how he met Lawrence Tibbett.

But along the way, he met Lawrence Tibbett, who was the main male singer for the opera. If you're a woman, they call them prima donnas. I don't know what it's called. If you're a man, prima don, maybe. But Lawrence Tibbett was the principal male singer at the Metropolitan Opera. And he was.

You can go to Google and check it out. I think it was from 1945 to 55. And so, they became running buddies all around Manhattan. I think Lawrence even sneaked him into one of the choruses, you know, on one of the shows at the Met. My dad got to sing in a chorus. I believe what happened was that Lawrence Tibbett suggested that my dad go to Paris to study opera.

So, after he spent probably a year in New York, or a year and a half, he went to Paris to study opera. Then I believe he came back to New York, and he still was great friends with Lawrence Tibbett. And they ran around. But by

this time, John Mayo, his dad, wanted him back in Tulsa to help run the hotel.

JE: So, did your father go to Paris to sing, to learn, to sing opera?

PM: Well, to a school there.

JE: Of singing?

PM: Yes, an opera school.

JE: So, was that accomplished?

PM: Mm-hmm. No. He had the... And Lawrence Tibbett thought he probably could go forward with it. Even getting into the Met, possibly, with Lawrence Tibbett's help. You know, as a background singer. You know, certainly not as a front man. But... So, my dad ends up coming back to Tulsa, where he met my mom. And then that's where that part happened.

JE: Would your dad, to entertain your family in the house, would he sing...

PM: Oh, sure.

JE: ...in an opera style?

PM: It would just launch into one of his favorite operas.

JE: Yeah.

PM: And he would have it set up on his stereo, where the Saturday afternoon broadcast live from the Met in New York, it would be on every Saturday afternoon.

JE: So, would that influence you at some point? I mean, were you trying to sing like him and be...

PM: Well, I didn't get his baritone voice.

JE: No? Well, you probably tried.

PM: I did not. I did not. And... Oh, well.

JE: Right.

PM: I do some background vocals in my band.

JE: Yeah. Yeah. But you have a great appreciation for opera today, do you? Or you're not that interested?

PM: I never studied it the way he did, because when we grew up in the 60s, we were all about the music of the 60s.

JE: Yeah. Yeah.

PM: Which both my parents tolerated, even though my dad was an opera fan. They allowed all that.

JE: So, not necessarily today you'd go to an opera, just...

JE: I've been to some, sure. In fact, the Tulsa Opera Company has put on performances at Tulsa Theater. Not recently, but...

JE: So, this is why you've got music in your veins.

PM: It is true.

JE: From your father.

PM: Yep. And his mother was a music teacher at Tulsa Public School.

JE: There you go. Wow. Do you remember the name?

PM: Lillian Van Blarkham was her name.

JE: These teachers need to be called out, be given credit.

PM: Mm-hmm.

JE: Your aunt, Marjorie Mayo Fagan Bird.

PM: Yes.

JE: And we have interviewed her for Voices of Oklahoma, and her father was John Mayo.

PM: Right. So, Marjorie and my dad were siblings.

JE: Your remembrances of Marjorie.

PM: Yes. She was always very proper, in that old-fashioned way. Dressed in nice-looking suits, almost kind of a formal appearance. She loosened up a little bit when she got older, which was more fun. You would go over to her house, and there would always be the smell of a pot roast cooking in the kitchen, and we would have Thanksgivings over there.

And her beloved son, Donny Fagan, we all loved. He had a great sense of humor. And unfortunately, he had a fatal disease that he ended up passing at about age 32.

JE: Mm-hmm.

PM: And cystic fibrosis. We all loved Donny. He was also a musician, played piano. He was a few years older than my brother and I, so he brought a different genre of music with him. He grew up in the 50s where we grew up in the 60s. So he knew more about Little Richard and those kinds of artists that came through.

But as far as Marjorie goes, as a young guy, we didn't get to know her very well, other than we would spend Thanksgivings with her. And it was really Donny, her son, that we knew, that my brother and I knew well.

JE: So was there big family gatherings for Christmas and Thanksgiving and the whole game?

PM: Usually at Marjorie's house, yes. And then the whole Mayo clan would be there.

JE: Mm-hmm. Yeah. You have brothers, sisters?

PM: One brother, Dan, yes, who was named after John Mayo, my grandfather.

JE: Right.

Chapter 05 – 9:28

Cains Ball Room

John Erling (JE): So then your education, where did you go to your elementary school?

Peter Mayo (PM): I went to Holland Hall and graduated there.

JE: And out of high school?

PM: Right.

JE: And what year did you graduate?

PM: 1970.

JE: Then what happens to you?

PM: Well, I was going to pursue, you know, postgraduate, you know, a formal degree. But when I got out to California, which is where I'd been accepted, I ended up meeting some people in the concert business and basically dropped out and did not pursue a formal degree but did study some technical courses and studied electronics and audio electronics at the time and was able to meet with people who were in the audio business, which at the time was just in the beginnings of its development in terms of live concert audio, which is what I was interested in.

JE: And you were playing piano out there, I suppose.

PM: No, I dropped music at that point. I was concentrating on the technical side of all this. I didn't take up piano again until, well, probably 20 years ago. So there was a 20 or 30 year span where I didn't play.

JE: Okay, then why did you pick it up?

PM: Well, it was after my divorce, and it was a good therapy to... And it still is. Any musician will tell you that. It kind of keeps you sane to play music and figure out musical challenges and that kind of thing.

JE: You said you were divorced from that marriage. Did you have children?

PM: Yes, I have one daughter, Ashley.

JE: What does she do?

PM: She's a therapist in Austin. She's a licensed clinical therapist in Texas.

JE: Okay. Yeah. But in California, was it the sound design business that you learned there?

PM: Yes. Yes. In Southern California, I met some people there, and then it turns out they were from the Bay Area. So that's where we went next. And from that basis, I was able to meet the sound design people there that were doing sound design for all of the groups at the time.

You know, Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Journey, Doobie Brothers, all the big groups out of the Bay Area at that time. And so I basically worked for him, and we were able to go out and do concerts and do audio for these groups. We kind of had to make it up as we went. These days, when you buy an audio system, you can order it out of a box, and it arrives, and you unpack it, and you plug it in, and it's ready to go.

That's not how it worked then. There were industrial paging systems. Movie theaters had sound systems, but they weren't quite heavy enough to do concert audio, so they had to be modified. There were just lots of

gyrations we went through developing what has become the concert audio system business, which is... like I say, now, has been standardized to a point.

JE: So then you did bring that knowledge to Tulsa.

PM: Yes.

JE: And so you were in California then for how many years?

PM: Two years.

JE: Two years. And then you decided to come home.

PM: Right. And a high school acquaintance of mine, Robert C. Bradley Jr., he had just graduated from Duke University, where he had been the concert... He was the concert promoter there for the university for the two or three years that he was in that position. And he had brought in all the big groups of the time to Duke.

And he was quite the character, and so he knew that I was doing sound system technology. So he contacted me, and he said, we need to go down to this place. It's Cains Ballroom. And we walk in, and he was trying to purchase... Cains from the then-owner, a lady named Marie Myers.

And so we met Marie, and she was an elderly lady who was sometimes living in the office down there. And we... Long story short, we took Cains, which at that point was not doing much. It was doing a few square dances, which would draw, you know, 50 or 100 people. But Robert Bradley thought that it could be... you know, a famous concert facility. And he was having to kind of argue that point with most of his friends.

Some other people were helping him at the time. Jeff Nix was helping him. Jim Edwards and some others were helping him. And I was the technical consultant in terms of audio and acoustics. So we brought the sound system... We constructed a sound system for Cains at that time. And R.C. started promoting shows in there. For two years, we were there, from 73 until 75.

And then Larry Schaefer bought it, basically, from R.C. Well, Cains, of course, had been famous for Bob Wills and all the country acts. And so then R.C. comes along with the more contemporary acts. He was the first guy to put contemporary acts in there. And so that was a hard sell for some people, probably, because they didn't know what they were doing. They envisioned it as, oh, that's country.

JE: Is that true?

PM: Well, when you say hard sell, R.C. was trying to find investors. He totally believed in it. If you understand the music business, you understand that just selling tickets is the name of the game. And if Bob Wills' music was popular during the 40s, and it's 1973, you've got to fast forward.

You've got to fast forward to 1973 and bring in the talent that people want to see then. And he was good at that. He brought in a lot of popular groups of that era. We did get to meet the remains of whoever was left from the Bob Wills group. They would come down. They were interested in what we were doing. It was a lot of fun. They would just drop in.

You know, Johnny Lee Wills, Wills was still alive then. Chamlin, I think, the guitar player, he would stop by. As well as a lot of the other artists who had participated in the Western Swing movement. They'd stop by because they were so interested in how the Western Swing dance hall could be doing modern music now.

JE: Right. We're talking 70...

PM: 73 until 75. Yeah.

JE: That's for a year with them.

PM: That was the two years that R.C. had it. Right.

JE: And then you said Larry Schaefer had it. We should bring in Dr. Jim Rogers here.

PM: Right.

JE: Who bought it from...

PM: Well, it went through another owner after Schaefer, Finnerty, Danny Finnerty.

JE: Yes.

PM: And then Danny Finnerty, Danny Finnerty, sold it to the Rogers family.

JE: Okay.

PM: And they're the ones who brought it up to modern day standards.

JE: They rehabbed the place, didn't they?

PM: Oh, completely.

JE: Yeah. Dr. Rogers, of course, passed this past year. We have his oral history and he talks about that.

PM: Yeah.

JE: And so his sons now operate it.

PM: Right. Chad and Hunter. And they're... They do a great job. They've been able to elevate the caliber of entertainment. It was a vision that my friend R.C. always had and he was trying to convince all his friends that this place is going to be great someday. And everybody around them were like, yeah, okay. But the Rogers family did it.

Well, give Schaefer a lot of credit too. There's an old saying in the concert business that if you can bring in a good concert, if you can bring in the right artist, it doesn't matter what venue you put it into, you're going to sell tickets to it.

JE: Build it and they will come?

PM: Well, bring in the artist and they will come. It's almost that simple. It's down to the artist that you have on the stage. However, if you make the facility better, that has benefits also.

JE: Yeah. And the facility is a draw for the performer. If he says, I don't want to perform in that kind of place, so you have to have an attractive...

Chapter 06 – 7:20

Tulsa Municipal Theatre

John Erling (JE): So while you're there at Cains, there's a building over here that must be in your brain. Right. You're thinking about, well, hmm, I could be in this business too.

Peter Mayo (PM): Well, my background being in audio and acoustics, I'd seen many concerts at Tulsa Municipal Theater and the acoustics were outstanding. And there was a building in New York called the Fillmore East and maybe the greatest... the greatest promoter of the time, Bill Graham, was the guy behind that. And I'd been fortunate enough to see some of the shows at Fillmore East where the acoustics were just astounding, as good as it gets. So I'd always had in my mind that Tulsa Municipal Theater could be in that same category of excellent acoustic environment to see a show.

In 1977, the city of Tulsa, the city of Tulsa advertised what they were going to build, the new Performing Arts Center. So they have to advertise when they get rid of equipment that they have. Every year, I believe, or every couple of years, they put in the paper that they're having a sale of their equipment.

And listed along with that was Tulsa Municipal Theater, and it was in very small print. And my friend Eric Grimshaw saw it in the Tulsa Legal News at the back of the publication. It was, you know.

JE: We've got some traffic outside. That's okay.

PM: Yeah, it was in very small print. He called me up and said, you may not know it, but the city's selling Tulsa Municipal Theater. So it was a sealed bid, and they'd had it appraised, but they didn't let you know the appraisal. And we just had to guess at what to offer on it. It turned out I was the only bidder.

Later on, I found out that Schaefer had been interested and the Tipsword family had been interested, but they did not pursue it. And I was the only bidder. The bid price was \$35,000. And just as the story goes, they'd had it appraised, but they'd had it appraised for what it would cost if someone was going to tear it down. So you have to factor in demolition costs to that. And that's how it ended up that the \$35,000 bid was just barely above the appraised value. Now, over the years, we've spent many, many times that amount. The place needed a ton of work.

JE: It just floors me that you bought this, well, the Brady Theater, as we still want to call it, for \$35,000. Right.

PM: Yeah. The price of a good used car.

JE: Were you nervous about when you purchased this?

PM: Absolutely. The city had put restrictions into the sales contract because they had just built a performing arts center. And the attorney for the city of Tulsa had asked that they put in a restriction for seven years that it couldn't be used as a live performance theater.

Of course, that's what it was. What else are you going to do with it? And at that point, I was so passionate about doing the project that I even agreed to that. And there were some stipulations that you could do dinner theater. And so we said, okay, we'll do some dinner theater. We'll do whatever you need. And we put up with the restrictions for seven years.

And we did a few concerts along the way, and they didn't say anything. So after the seven-year restriction was over, then we just did exclusively concerts at that point.

JE: What's so interesting is you were in sound design and setting up speakers and all that. And you buy a building that basically didn't need any of your equipment at all.

PM: I tell some of the artists that who come through, just turn all that stuff off.

JE: Right.

PM: Very few, they won't do that. A few of them have tried it, like on one song. And the crowd loves it when they do it.

JE: Well, let's do a little history on it. That this city of Tulsa built it 1912, 1914.

PM: Finished in 1914.

JE: And they had a \$125,000 bond issue to make that happen. And then it was originally designed as a municipal auditorium and convention hall for Tulsa.

PM: Right.

JE: And you can take off on this story here. I mean, it was built as the largest hall between Kansas City and Houston, Texas. That's how great it was.

PM: And they put a pipe organ in that was built as one of the greatest in the middle part of the country. And I believe in 1929, they wanted to give it a facelift. It was only, what, 13 years old at that point. And they brought in Bruce Goff, who had been working with Frank Lloyd Wright. He was like a protege of Frank Lloyd Wright. And they only gave him one summer to do the renovation.

So the interior that's still in there that Bruce Goff put in in 1929, we have tried to restore it along the way as well as we can. There are pictures of it. There's a book out which has some pictures of the original restoration, which was beautiful. In 1977, I put in the bid, and the contract was finalized in 78. So I've owned it since 1978.

JE: Mm-hmm. And this is interesting. At one time, the building was used as a detention center during the 1921 race?

PM: Correct.

JE: Massacre.

PM: 1921 is also the year that Enrico Caruso played at Tulsa Convention Hall. And he was the biggest star, probably worldwide at the time. But so the, you know, when I got the place, I didn't, none of us really knew much of the history of the Tulsa race riot. And, um, as we would learn more, it was just heartbreaking to, to hear all of it. Um, fortunately, we believe it, it was only used as a detention area and nothing, you know, nothing more evil than that.

JE: Yeah. Right. Um, again,

PM: I don't, the history book that was written by Jamie Townsend, *Memoirs of the Old Lady*, she was able to go back and really do some of the history on that.

JE: And you gave me the book. I have it here on the table. I'm going to refer to it later.

PM: Yes.

JE: Stories told from the Brady Theater itself. Yeah. Onto many, many people. It's, it's, it's a great book and I would highly recommend it.

Chapter 07 – 7:20

Enrico Caruso

John Erling (JE): Let's go back to the legend of Enrico Caruso.

Peter Mayo (PM): Yes, I do know that story.

JE: And tell us that story.

PM: Well, like I was saying, he was one of the greatest stars of the time. He was, um, one of the premier opera singers, one of the greatest singers in the world. And opera was a big deal then, right? I mean, there wasn't, there weren't rock shows yet or anything like that. So, um, the, the Hayechka Club, which was a local promoting group, had brought in Enrico.

And when he got here, he decided he wanted to see an oil field. He wanted to, he was hoping that he could see, uh, what happens when you, when, when they put dynamite down into the drill bore and perforate it. Sometimes when that happens, you get a gusher or in the old days you would.

And he was hoping to see that. And they were not able, they did take him out into, I believe in San Springs. And it was, uh, it was an entourage of three cars. And as the story goes, a cold day was in January. And on the, on the way back, all three cars had problems, either for months, mud or whatever. And he ended up walking the last six blocks back to Brady theater, Tulsa theater in cold weather. And he already had a lung problem. Apparently he already suffered from pleurisy.

So as the story goes, he gave a great performance that night and it got great reviews and he lived in Italy and he, I believe he only did two more performances after that. And then went back to his home in Italy where he died six months later from pleurisy. And as the story goes, it was the cold that he caught in Tulsa while out in oil fields that led to his passing. And as such, he comes back and haunts the place.

JE: Right. And I needed to ask you that. And so, so have you, you've been alone in that theater? I'm, I mean in the convention hall, or the Brady theater many times and wondered if the ghost is there with you.

PM: Well, I try to talk to him, call out his name. "Come help me out here Enrico." It is a dark place. You walk in even in the middle, we could go over there right now. And it's pitch black when you go in because it's a theater. Unless you turn on electric lights, there's no light. So it can be the middle of the day that you can try to conjure up Enrico. But no, I've been there

many times at night. Uh, used to work late at night down there and it would be creepy. Yeah. No. And your imagination would, would get ahold of you.

JE: Oh yeah. You'd hear a sound.

PM: You'd hear a sound. And, and so there's lots of, of, uh, gusty little, you know, you know, it's, it's not an airtight building. So when the wind is blowing outside, things can happen. Sounds can happen. And a lot of people think that, that that is the spirits talking to them.

JE: I, I'm, we should acknowledge that your friend and my friend, Mike Boyd is sitting in listening to this story.

PM: Right.

JE: And if he thinks that he needs something added, then we'll do that. Okay. It's nice to have Mike with us as we're talking about this. I'm going to keep calling it the Brady theater. It was one of only 16 theaters in the United States, equipped to host a full metropolitan opera production. It had a large, uh, orchestra pit.

PM: You know, it wouldn't do it today because the technical capabilities of modern day theaters is way beyond what they built in 1914. But at the time it was equipped to do that.

JE: I'm sure there were those on the East coast or whatever, "Tulsa, Oklahoma has a place like this?"

PM: Well, and I, when I'm out of town and I tell people about Tulsa, I say, uh, "The maple Ridge neighborhood is a good example of why it was so special in those days." because Tulsa was only about 30,000 people. But if you drive through maple Ridge and see all these giant houses that were built during this time period, you can't go to other like sized towns like Omaha or Des Moines or Shreveport. You can find nice neighborhoods, but they're not like Maple Ridge.

So to your point, people from all over the world wanted to come see this

little oil boom town, Tulsa, Oklahoma. It was a destination in those days. So having a good theater, the way you could also bring in talent was just something else that the patrons of Tulsa wanted to have very similar to when the BOK was built 10 years ago. The older arena was not large enough or didn't have the technical capabilities to bring in the modern day artists.

So we built the new BOK arena and it's done incredibly well. Yeah, I guess you'd say you could say the same thing was true in 1912 when the boosters, the local boosters who had lots of money and had big houses over in Maple Ridge, they wanted some good talent to come in too. At the time it was built, they could cram. If I believe, you know, some of the things I've read 4,200 people right now, the capacity is about 2,850 people, the current capacity in Tulsa theater.

But at the time they could put as many as 4,200 in there. They would, I don't know how they did it because it was built for another balcony. It was built for two balconies, which was a, the second one was never put in another bit, another bit of trivia. I don't know if I answered your question, but yeah.

JE: And it was interesting that you would own this building in the same building that your father had produced. Tulsa Philharmonic.

PM: Correct. And he would, he would bring me to Tulsa municipal theater. It's named then on Sunday afternoons for Philharmonic rehearsals, which was so interesting. It was a, it was a great place to be for a young teenager. I liked going. My brother didn't really like going to those, but my, my father knew that my interest was in those kinds of things. And he said, yeah, come on, let's go down and see that.

JE: You know, there are some things that just meant to be right. Tracking your life to this and that. I mean, it,

PM: Oh, I was fascinated by it. It was, it was, you know, and I'd get to talk to the stagehands and the kind of the behind the scenes part of it, is, is, is what interested me so much. "Now, how does it work when you bring a set in and you raise it and lower it?"

Chapter 08 – 8:21**\$37,777.77**

John Erling (JE): So when you bought the Tulsa Municipal Theater, talk about the neighborhood, the conditions here.

Peter Mayo (PM): Good point, John.

JE: And what was going on. So first of all, tell us about that. Describe that.

PM: Well, my first introduction was when R.C. Bradley came back from Duke University and he became a promoter here. And he got the rights to Cain's Ballroom and started promoting shows there. So this was in 1973. So when we came down here, you had, you know, there was a bottle shop where the tavern is now that sold pint bottles of liquor.

JE: That's the tavern restaurant.

PM: Uh-huh. Tavern restaurant. And this was before David Sharp had acquired any of that property. And above that, they had rooms for rent. Not very nice rooms. And other than that, there was... There were dilapidated warehouses down here that had nothing in them. It was mainly a warehouse district. And there was some oil field manufacturing going on. But other than that, you didn't have...

There was nothing going on. There were no apartments like we have today. There were no restaurants. There were no bars. It was a dilapidated part of Tulsa. So in the 60s, something called urban renewal went on. And it was the thing... There was a thinking there with the powers that be that the thing to do was to tear down a lot of these dilapidated buildings, which a ton of them were torn down. The ones on either side of the railroad tracks are all gone. The red brick buildings.

So anyway, when we were down here, it... When R.C. and his entourage started Cains up in 1973, we literally had to kind of walk around the

dilapidated condition of the neighborhood just to get to the front door and get in.

JE: Into Cains?

PM: And it was the first entertainment destination... Of course, when Cains was going, you know, like a great show place it was in the 40s. I don't... I wasn't around, but I'm sure it was a different situation then. But in 1973, the lady who owned it, she wasn't doing anything with it. And we really had to work around the neighborhood just to get to the place. And so did the audience. The audience was there. The audience was kind of leery of coming down here and parking, even going to shows.

JE: 73. So then 75 is when you...

PM: 77 is when the municipal theater became... went up for sale by the city of Tulsa. And really, the neighborhood had not changed very much then.

JE: Yeah. Did that bother you as you considered buying the theater?

PM: Oh, people thought I was crazy.

JE: And did you think you were crazy?

PM: Well, I had a passion for music. As you have described, you know, whether or not you want to give it credit to my father or whatever.

JE: Right. So that didn't bother you that the area was not very appealing?

PM: No, I went into that theater and I heard the acoustics and I thought, this is a jewel. Yeah. It's just a total jewel. It's in a bad neighborhood. Oh well.

JE: Right. Yeah. You know, I just want to emphasize how you saved the building from demolition.

PM: Right.

JE: If you hadn't bought it from the city of Tulsa, they were considering demolishing it.

PM: Well, there were two dairy companies at that point in time that were right across the street from Tulsa Theater. Literally, right across Brady to the south and to the west, there was Carnation. Large dairies. So you had an industrial element going on where that had taken over the neighborhood. You had warehouses and you had some light industry going on. There was no recreation.

There were no bars, et cetera, no restaurants, none of that. Right. So the city, I believe, and I'm speculating here, that they were thinking, well, no one's going to buy this place and revive it as a theater. So these dairy companies will probably take it over, either tear it down or whatever, and use it for some industrial purpose. And that was the thinking, yes. And most of the people I knew thought, you know, "why are you buying that place?"

JE: So I'm trying to emphasize again. You saved this building from demolition.

PM: Well, thank you.

JE: And preserved it as a historical piece for Tulsans forever and ever and \$35,000.

PM: Right, which is a fraction of what it cost once we got in there.

JE: Right. Because then you got in and you put many, many dollars.

PM: Do you want the full story on the 35?

JE: Yes.

PM: Okay. So in 1977, Oral Roberts went on a promotional campaign. For donations. He'd go on TV. He'd go on the radio. And he'd say, "We're building the City of Faith Hospital. And, you know, it's a miracle that this happened. And in a vision, I was told that I could only accept donations in increments of seven. So if you send some money in to help me get this City

of Faith built, it needs to be either 7 cents or 77 cents or \$77,000.”

So my mother and my father had a sense of humor about these kinds of things. And when we put the bid in, we put it in for \$37,777.77. As a tribute to Oral. My dad knew Oral Roberts.

JE: Oh, okay. I'm sure he did.

PM: And my dad knew all those guys. They were friends. And they would chuckle about stuff like that.

JE: Oh, yeah. Oh, that's funny that your bid went for that amount of money.

PM: It was kind of a tribute to Oral.

JE: Yeah. So your mother and dad were around when you were buying this?

PM: Oh, yes. They were instrumental. If it wasn't for my mom and her generosity, none of this would have happened.

JE: Okay.

PM: It's because they were the seed money to get it done.

JE: All right. Good, good, good, good, good.

PM: And my dad had been down here doing Philharmonic for all those years.

JE: Yes.

PM: And he would kind of shield his eyes when I would talk about it, like, oh, okay, you want that place, huh? My mother was totally into it.

JE: But it wasn't that tough a sell to your father.

PM: No. He said yes. I mean, he appreciated that I wanted to keep the building going, a place where he had, you know, worked basically for years.

JE: And you probably don't even want to know how many dollars you put into this place.

PM: None of us want to know. But that 37 was just a fraction of the true cost.

JE: Was it the last show at the theater, Todd Rundgren?

PM: That was when the city owned it, yes. And the city had, or the announcer at the show had told the audience, to take a piece of the seats with them when they left.

JE: Really?

PM: Yes. And so the seats were kind of banged up when I got here. And the city of Tulsa had told their employees to go in and take whatever they wanted. So there was no heating system. Even the door closers were missing. The filigree hardware on some of the doors had been taken off, you know. We had a huge challenge in front of us.

JE: Yes.

PM: To get it up and running again.

JE: Isn't there a tunnel?

PM: Well, there's what we call a pipe chase under it. And there may have been, a lot of these buildings 120 years ago did have tunnels going under the streets to adjoining buildings. And we don't know for sure if this one had one. But it's been blocked off if there was one.

JE: Okay. But the tunnel is to accommodate?

PM: There's a pipe chase that runs all the way under the theater, which you can walk through. And it accommodates all the pipes.

JE: You call it a pipe chase. You're chasing pipes. You're following pipes.

PM: Yes. It has the steam pipes, the plumbing, the sewer pipes. Everything's down there.

JE: Yeah. Trivia question. What was the last song sung when the city owned it by Todd Rundgren?

PM: Hello, It's Me?

JE: Hello, It's Me.

PM: Well, that's his big hit. That's the only reason I guessed that was because that was his biggest hit.

JE: He did a somersault from a 15-foot pyramid.

PM: Oh, he had a...

JE: Placed in the middle of the stage. He had a trampoline set up.

PM: Yeah. did not see that show, I will confess.

Chapter 09 – 10:33

Name Changes

John Erling (JE): So, let's go through the name change

Peter Mayo (PM): Sure. Starting from the beginning. Convention Hall. Tulsa Convention Hall. And really, I think that was misnamed because it mainly did live performances. They could lower... It had a sloped floor, but they could lower it. It had a manual jack system that they could lower the floor and make it flat.

And they would bring in, I guess, very small conventions because you can't get very... You couldn't get... By today's standards, you couldn't really... You could not get a convention in there. But they would try. But mainly, it was done for live performance of the time, which would have been mainly

opera, symphony, comedy, vaudeville, vaudeville entertainment.

So, that was the name then was Tulsa Convention Hall. And it retained that name until 1952 when it became Tulsa Municipal Theater. A lot of the boosters, the local boosters, raised money in 1952 to do a renovation where they put the front lobby on there. That buff brick front lobby was put on in 1952, as well as 17 extra feet on the stage.

They upgraded the stage equipment and they added the front lobby in 1952. Then the name was Tulsa Municipal Theater. And to my understanding, when you go back and read the history, that it was probably successful for, you know, 10 years, 15 years into the mid-60s. And then it became kind of dated. The general public, you know, there were a lot of people who wanted a new theater starting in the late 60s. And so, that went on for the next 10 years until the Performing Arts Center was built.

And so, when the general feeling among the city fathers was to build a new theater, they had the problem, what are we going to do with the old one? That's when they put it for sealed bid auction in 1977, where I ended up being the only bidder. So, here I am. A 25, 26-year-old kid who puts in a \$35,000 bid gets the bid. And knowing the name Tulsa Municipal Theater just has two, much of an establishment ring.

You know, in those days, we wanted things that were not establishment. You know, we wanted to be with the music scene that was going on then. So, that was not an appropriate name. So, it was on Brady Street. We didn't know anything about the controversy of Tate Brady at this time. It was just the name of a street. And it had kind of a historic name feel to it. So, we went with Brady Theater at that point.

And ran it for many, many years until the history started to come forward that the controversy surrounding the name Brady.

JE: And that he had association with the KKK.

PM: All that stuff started to come to life. Yeah.

JE: Yeah. So, then...

PM: Well, and I went down for the hearings at the Tulsa commissioners' meetings. I attended all the hearings. They had numerous hearings on it. It's interesting that a name change of a street would garner so much interest. And probably rightly so. So, I was there for the meetings. And they first changed it to another Brady. You know, not Tate Brady. To someone... I think it was M.B. Brady. And that didn't go over.

Because that was kind of like, oh, come on. It's still Brady. So, then the meetings continued with the city commissioners and counselors. This went on, what, for two or three years? I mean, what a drama going on. And finally, they came up with the idea of a Reconciliation way for the name of the street. So, we couldn't call it the old lady on Reconciliation. It just didn't have a good ring.

So, we decided to go back to its name it had before, which was Tulsa Theater. With Tulsa Municipal Theater, we struck the municipal out. And just went with Tulsa Theater. It may get another name at some point. We may leave the Tulsa sign up there. But we may go with something more current. We haven't figured out what that name would be yet.

JE: All right. Let's talk about the sign. Because it had been stored for a long time someplace.

PM: Well, I was the guy that had it taken down in 1978. Because we didn't want Tulsa Municipal Theater. So, we took the sign down. And it was stored in a warehouse. And... Which eventually was sold. But a good friend of mine, Gaylord Heron, who was a local photographer, artist. It turns out I was buying a bicycle at his bike shop years later. And he said, hey, by the way, I have your old Tulsa sign in my backyard. And it was made out of stainless steel.

So, it had not rusted. And we went by and looked at it. And my gosh, yeah. We're having to change the name of the theater. At this time anyway, you know, what a fortunate situation that we ran into each other. And you told me you had this sign. We'll put it up. And he just gave it to us.

JE: Wow. Perfect.

PM: He was a great guy, Gaylord Heron.

JE: Let's have a little piano from you right now.

PM: Well.

JE: Give us a little.

PM: All right. (Piano music) That was one of my father's favorite songs.

JE: Would that be a theme of your life?

PM: Well, it definitely was for my dad.

JE: You did it your way?

PM: I think you would say for me also. Yeah, sure. I was able to follow my passion with following the sound design, as you call it. And the early days of it when we were inventing a lot of the equipment.

JE: Hmm. You're famous for your invitational Halloween party along with the Brady Orchestra. So there's two pieces to talk about that. Let's visit about that a little bit.

PM: Okay.

JE: The Halloween. How did that come about? The Halloween party?

PM: Well, it's really the brainchild of a friend of mine, Richard Shaughnessy. He started it in his house 52 years ago. And he came to me probably 20 years ago saying he wanted to make it bigger. And he had a guest list. He would do invitation only. Even in this day and age of Internet where everything's done that way, he still wanted to do printed invitations.

So for the past 20 years, we've done it at Brady Theater or at Tulsa Theatre, his invitation-only Halloween party. And along the way, we decided that

the musician friends that I had, that we all decided this would be a good opportunity for our band. And we do a lot of classical rock mainly. The music that we grew up with. A lot of Beatles. And it became kind of a fixture of the party.

There would always be other entertainment in addition to the Brady Band, as we called it, or Brady Orchestra. It was a win-win for both Richard Shaughnessy and for myself to do the party here.

JE: Tell me the names of the band members.

PM: Right. Well, starting with the horn section, the principal guy in the horn section is a guy named Rod Clark. And he's a music teacher. He's an extraordinary talent. And he's able to write music himself. He does read music. All three of the guys in the horn section. When I said earlier that rock musicians really don't read music, well, some do.

And those guys are extraordinary musicians. And Rod Clark is able to arrange. He can go out of town and arrange parts for Los Angeles or in Nashville. Anyway, he's the trombone player. Victor Anderson is the sax player. And our new addition is Steve Hefner on trumpet. He's also a music teacher. Kevin Flint on bass. George Barton, lead guitar. Trick Savage, also on lead guitar. Judge Porter on drums. Mike Wilson on keyboard and vocals. And my friend Eric Grimshaw is on percussion.

JE: And you?

PM: I'm on keyboard, mainly grand piano. And every now and then a little backing vocal.

JE: This piano you're sitting in front of, what model, what is that?

PM: That's a Yamaha, a Concert Grand Yamaha that we bought for the Brady Theater way, many, many years ago. Found it from a guy in a small town. Had it in his living room. These are all established local Tulsa musicians that have other bands they play in. But think it's important enough to do this classic rock kind of cover band that we do. That everyone gets together, oh, two or three times a year to put the music together.

JE: I actually listened. You have sound bites of your music.

PM: Okay.

JE: And it's great, great sound.

Chapter 10 – 12:33

Best Concerts

John Erling (JE): Some of the best concerts you felt you've had here at the theater. I know Bill Maher came through and had an HBO special. Talk to us about that.

Peter Mayo (PM): Well, that was exciting. He, you know, being a very blue, you know, liberal comedian, he was always impressed that he could raise such a big crowd here in Oklahoma when he came. He didn't understand that. So when he got ready to do his HBO special, he said, well, let's take it to Oklahoma, just for the kind of contrast that that would provide. So he's always been a fan of coming here to do his show. I've only met him briefly. He's an interesting guy.

I don't think he's as partisan as people like to think he is. I think he's more fair-minded than a lot of people think. But he's always had a good turnout here. And it was exciting to have the HBO television crews come in and do that and get to see all of their fancy technology.

JE: Stand-up comedians have done well here, haven't they?

PM: It's turning out to where stand-up is going to be a very big part of our, you know, of our attractions.

JE: George Carlin performed here.

PM: At least three times. And I would pick him up at the airport.

JE: What was that like?

PM: Oh, he's awesome.

JE: So was George riding around in his car about the same kind of guy that he would be on stage?

PM: Yes. Usually, comedians, it's interesting, they, you know, musicians have to rehearse their material. Well, comedians are very similar. When you pick them up in the afternoon, a lot of times they're just going over the jokes that they have to memorize that night.

JE: Yeah.

PM: They don't want to make mistakes. So they're a little bit distracted. Kind of like, "yeah, I'm glad to have this conversation with you, but I need to get to my dressing room. And I need to cram over my jokes that I'm going to be telling." Because what an art it is to stand up there for an hour or an hour and 15 minutes and tell memorized jokes and get the audience. And, you know, engaged with it. That is a real craft.

JE: Yes. And to make it look as easy as they do.

PM: Right.

JE: When you know they've really worked hard to memorize, as you've just said. And then some of them just take off on their own.

PM: Right.

JE: They didn't know they were going to say it.

PM: The really talented ones can ad lib on it.

JE: Don Henley with Sheryl Crow was.

PM: That was a memorable one. That was the first time he came in. And we didn't know it. We didn't know it at the time because Sheryl Crow was not

famous at the time, but she was playing bass for him. And a great show. And at the end, they did Hotel California as a duet. And they danced together. And it's one of the ones I will always remember.

Robin Williams, he was here two or three times.

JE: Did you get to be around him?

PM: The first time, he didn't have his manager with him. He just showed up at about 11 in the morning. And you could tell he was kind of a little, you know, he wanted to be around him. He wanted some interaction with people. So he didn't just stay in his dressing room. He walked around and talked to everybody all afternoon. And he was totally the same Robin Williams off camera as he was on. Cracking jokes all the time. Just hilarious.

JE: Beach Boys, Brian Wilson.

PM: One of my favorites.

JE: Why?

PM: Well, I was always a fan of Beach Boys music, number one. And... There was so much heart and soul put into that concert. I know it's played here in Tulsa twice. You know, one time was at a casino. But he had the children of some of the Beach Boys musicians playing instruments. Mike Love's son and some others.

And they played the old Beach Boys songs with so much heart and soul that... It was sold out. The audience loved it. And... Everybody just loved Brian Wilson.

JE: Yeah.

PM: He wasn't at 100%, you know, for whatever reasons. He can't perform at 100%. But it didn't matter.

JE: Yeah. Yeah. Was it last year that Bob Dylan was here?

PM: I believe so. About a year ago.

JE: My wife and I attended that concert. Let me just jump in and say we were so enamored by the fact that he took his upright piano. Yes. Oh. Face the back of it to the front of the auditorium. And basically stayed behind that and apparently did not want us to see what he looked like at 80-some years old.

PM: Yeah. The lights were rather dim, weren't they?

JE: Yeah. Back there by his piano.

PM: Right. You know, another interesting story about that performance is that they had just opened his archives down the street. And he didn't stop by.

JE: No.

PM: And there was a Tulsa Drillers baseball game that night. And he walked down to the base. Bought a ticket, went in for a few minutes, and then walked back to the theater. He probably did walk by his archive place when he took that walk. Yeah, you know he did. So in a sense, he did check it out.

JE: Well, we'd heard about the Drillers, so you've confirmed it now.

PM: So that's interesting. And he's probably been at Brady. He's not the type of artist that's good. We have a lot of competition with casinos. Tulsa Theater does. And it's no secret. But there are certain artists that will not play at casinos. And he is one of them. He's not going to play at a casino. So when he does come to Tulsa, he plays at Tulsa Theater.

I think he's played at Canberra. He played at Cains one time. And it's largely the same show. He considers himself an ultimate artist, which of course he is. And as such, he will change his show around a little bit. He will change arrangements of the music slightly. He doesn't want to be categorized just as this 60s artist who was huge in the 60s. And just wants to be remembered as that.

He wants to be remembered as an artist in true form that is able to change and adapt his music as he goes forward. So he will change the arrangements. Sometimes he'll be playing a song that is a familiar song. But you're trying to, you don't know for sure if he's playing Blowing in the Wind because he's changed the arrangements so much. But that's, I think his audience understands that. It's not that he's out to please. It's not that he's out to please. Typical fans that want that. I think the fans understand that he's going to be artistic when he goes out.

JE: You consider yourself a fan of Bob Dylan.

PM: Sure. Oh, absolutely.

JE: Right.

PM: He changed. In my mind, from that generation of disruptive music that happened in the 60s, just a handful of groups go into that. And he's definitely one of them. Along with the Beatles and the Stones and a few others.

JE: I grew up in North Dakota and I was always taken with him because he grew up in Hibbing, Minnesota.

PM: Right.

JE: And then he actually made his way to Minneapolis and got his legs under him and then things took off for him.

PM: And went to the coffee houses in Greenwich Village.

JE: So then he made that connection with Woody Guthrie.

PM: Yes, he did.

JE: When he was in New York and was really taken with him. And as I understand, would visit him in his later years when Woody was real sick. And so because of that, we have Dylan Museum here.

PM: I think that's a connection that he made. Yes.

JE: Yeah. Which is wonderful.

PM: Right. That we have two of those outstanding artists.

JE: Makes it another place of destination, doesn't it?

PM: It does.

JE: But the Beatles and can name every song they ever recorded.

PM: Well, our bands, out of the 211 songs, the band has probably played 150 of them.

JE: Yeah.

PM: I would recognize every song they recorded. I don't know if I could recite the name of every one.

JE: Right. Yeah. What drew you to the Beatles?

PM: Well, that my whole generation was drawn to it. Again, you know, the piano was in the living room. Just about half of the teenage of the day would talk their parents into buying a guitar or some drums or something. Everyone wanted to be like them. Garage bands flourished.

You know, which brings up an interesting comparison because today, if you're interested in music, you can go to Guitar Center and buy a recording setup. And you can get your music out on YouTube. You know, you and your buddies, your musician buddies, can get your music out. Back in the day, you had to be chosen by a record company in order to even have a chance of doing that.

And the chances of that happening were so small. But still, everyone wanted to do it. So when the Beatles music came out, you know, it was so different from, say, Elvis and Frank Sinatra before that. Yeah.

It was such a departure from the previous form of rock music that everyone wanted to be a part of it somehow. And it was mainly a British invasion of music. The Americans did great. You know, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. I mean, the list goes on and on of fantastic. Billy Joel. Lots of great American composers in the rock genre.

But at the time, it was the Beatles. It was the Stones. It was The Who. All the... All the British groups, which were getting all the attention. And the young teenagers at the time wanted to be a part of it somehow. So my brother was a musician. He had a band at the time. And they would play a selection of music. And Beatles would obviously be included in that.

Now, if you want to analyze the talent capabilities of the Beatles, you know, a multi... A multitude of books have been written about it. And even though they did find the record company and they found the right producer, which definitely helped them in their careers, they had incredible talent. The lyrics were outstanding.

And even though they were not formally trained, they understand how to put chords together in a way that were so above their heads, really. You just... You just had to shake your heads of, how did they come up with that? You know, not being formally trained musicians. When Paul met John Lennon in Liverpool, John was playing a guitar that was tuned like a banjo because he didn't know how to make chords on a six string. It's easier to make chords on a banjo. So he had tuned his six string guitar, I think it only had four strings on it, like a banjo.

And from there, became one of the greatest songwriters in musical history. So it was that kind of admiration for their talent that wasn't just me. It was that whole generation of the 60s.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 11 – 7:00
Lionel Hampton

John Erling (JE): I should remind people we're in your studio, recording studio, which is right next to the Tulsa Theater. I remind people that's where we are again. The performers that came through, Tony Bennett and all these other people, did you have interaction with all of them, some of them, some of them didn't want to come on? Some of them didn't want to talk, some would.

Peter Mayo (PM): I did not inherit my father's gregarious nature, right? I'm more reserved, anyone that knows me. So I did not ask to be put in contact with artists when they came through. However, you still get to meet a few.

My mother was a huge Tony Bennett fan, and she was at the concert. I mean, that was the, the genre of music that my parents grew up with, Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett. And so we got to go backstage and meet Tony, and I was there, and she ran her fingers through his hair. And apparently he was wearing a toupee, and it dislodged the toupee. And I remember this. He just acted like nothing had happened. Just smiled. And my mom was an attractive lady, and he was happy to get the hug from.

JE: You know, I was thinking these stars are big, but maybe the history of the building is bigger than the stars themselves.

PM: Well, thank you for saying that because that's what's kept me motivated all these years. Because the stars come and go. And Tulsa sometimes is just on a routing arrangement as stars go through the middle of the country. But the building has real character, had the city of Tulsa not found someone like me in 1977, I fear that it would have been torn down.

And if you go back to that time period of 1912, 1914, of the four and five-story red brick buildings that were down in this area, there's very few left. And of course, they really wanted their best foot forward when they built, at the time, Tulsa Convention Hall. So it has some interesting architecture. But no, you're right, the artists come and go, but my passion came from the building itself.

It tells its own stories. We, to this day, we'll be in some corridor, or we'll be in some little room, and we'll see something and go, that's how the old timers did it. We found, you know, the plows that they used, we are speculating that they used horse and plow to build the foundation for the building, because we found evidence of that down in the ditches down there. Right. Horseshoe.

JE: Because they wouldn't have had mechanical tractors.

PM: Well, in 1912, it was just making the transition. Yeah. Just, there was some, but yeah, they were using, horse-driven plows to dig the footings for the foundation. And the place is built like a tank. Over the years, when they tried to get a new theater, some of the press reports would say, oh, well, structurally, it's not that good and everything. Well, no, they were just saying that. It's built very strong. Four-course thick outside walls. Interior is supported by steel and steel trusses.

JE: So much maintenance on a month-to-month basis?

PM: Yes. Well, we just put in new bathrooms and new bars, so we get a break there. Those should be good for a while without a ton of maintenance. But yes, the building requires constant maintenance. Like I say, we'll be in some room or some nook or some cranny of the building, and we'll see something that had been covered up for years. And we'll say, that's not how it's done now, but that's how they did it then.

And it's great to have those resources. And it's great to have those reminders of our history. And when the audience walks in, we still have the original wood chairs. Now, they're small. They're not as comfortable as new ones. But they are reminders of the craftsmanship that went into the stuff 100 years ago. And I've gone to great lengths to restore those chairs. I've had out-of-town promoters come in and say, there aren't any other theaters really that have preserved those the way you have. And kudos to you for doing that.

JE: If I were to ask you things in your life you're the most proud of, this has got to be one of them.

PM: Oh, it is. And my daughter.

JE: Of course.

PM: Of course. Of course.

JE: About the acoustics again, Lionel Hampton, the jazz legend. That's a cute story.

PM: It's great. Oh, I love telling this one. So he had to... He had to... He was a vibraphone player, right? With the mallets and the vibraphone. A jazz player. A very, very well-respected jazz player. And he had an outstanding jazz band with him. And it was mainly acoustic. Not much amplification for his show. So this was the middle of the summer, probably July. And so he gets out on stage and there's a cricket. Making its noise from the back of the stage. And you would think with normal rock music, you'd never hear a cricket.

And it wouldn't matter. And the show would just go on. Well, he stopped the show. And he could hardly walk. So he's limping around. Going back behind the drums, looking for the cricket. And the audience is just breaking out in laughter. And he was playing kind of the straight guy. Kind of the straight man.

Like, I'm trying to find this damn noise. And so the stagehands went out there and tried to help him. And then we finally thought we found it. And somebody got a shoe. And bang, comes down. I think we got the cricket. And so Lionel goes back to his instrument and starts playing again. And he thinks, you know, coast is clear. Good to go.

And sure enough, you know, ten minutes later, the cricket comes back. And the audience just roars out in laughter. I don't know if Lionel had too many comedic moments. Outings. But this was one of his. And he was not planning it. It was all ad lib. Great story. And I'll never forget it.

JE: Yeah. Kudos to the acoustics of that fine building.

Chapter 12 – 11:17**Bono**

John Erling (JE): From the book, *Memoirs of the Old Lady*, Jamie Townsend, I just opened up to some notes. Okay. 1983, Bono of the band U2 swung from the balcony, ran down the aisles of the Brady waving a white flag during their last Tulsa concert.

Peter Mayo (PM): I was there. I saw it

JE: You did?

PM: Yeah. He had in his mind that he was going to lower himself from the handrail. I shouldn't tell the story because people will get the idea and they'll try this. Do not try this. But he lowered himself from the handrail on the center aisle down to the aisle beneath him. He practiced it at rehearsal. And he left stage, went around outside in the alley, came in the front door and went up to the balcony and then lowered himself.

And the spotlight, well, the lights went on him. And, of course, the audience was aghast that this was going on. And I think I was. I was sitting in a seat in the aisle that he came down and went back on stage. It would be interesting to ask Mr. Bono about that, you know, years later, see if he still remembers that.

JE: Alice Cooper celebrated his birthday in 1987 on the balcony of the Brady.

PM: With a chainsaw and a birthday cake.

JE: He requested the cake be cut with a chainsaw while a little person played an accordion. The death threat on Ronnie Dunn before a show caused him to perform in a bulletproof vest.

PM: Now, Jamie Townsend has dug up some interesting trivia. I did not know that one.

JE: Dolly Parton once used the Brady Theater for a full week of rehearsal before going on her national tour.

PM: She was a lot of fun. And Red Skelton had a great run here. So before the casinos came in and started doing what we'll call baby boomer entertainment, there were no casinos to compete with during this time period you're talking about. So we were able to get Dolly Parton. We were able to get Red Skelton. And artists like that, which if that was true today, they would probably go out and play at casinos.

JE: My wife, Margaret, has always enjoyed it as I do Nora Jones. And she opened her North American tour here in 2010.

PM: She's been here, I think, three times.

JE: Yeah. Yeah. And her quote is, we picked Tulsa because you guys are awesome. We've been here four days and it's going to really be sad to leave, really. I think maybe we saw her the last time. There were some in the audience that kind of gave her a tough time. And she barked back at them.

PM: Sure. Right.

JE: Yeah. What a great talent. You know, booking these people is a tough business.

PM: Oh. Yeah. So tough.

JE: You perhaps were in it and maybe not in it.

PM: That's correct.

JE: Yeah. Why is it so tough?

PM: It's hard to put it in just a few words, but one of the rules of booking a show is don't necessarily bring in an artist that is your personal favorite. Because when you try doing that, about half the time it doesn't sell as well as you thought it would. So you're at the mercy of talent agencies. Either in

Los Angeles or Nashville or in the old days, New York. They have a pretty good feeling of which artists are going to sell tickets for you.

They have a feel for it because they've been representing these artists. The trick is getting the agencies to give the promoter, which would be me or anyone else who's bringing talent locally, get the agency to give you those really good artists. And it's kind of frustrating, especially now with casinos competing against Tulsa Theater. It's not something that I wanted to pursue personally. It's a tough business. It's tough dealing with these people. So I have a partner out of Oklahoma City, DCF Concerts, who does the booking part of it now.

My uncle once said about the promoting business, he says, Oh. I've ever heard of where you hire someone to do a job for you, the artist. And then the next day you start working for them.

JE: Hmm.

PM: Because they're so picky about their needs. And it is kind of an interesting thing about probably the motion picture business or the music business, either one, that you're dealing with artists who are famous. And yes, you're hiring them to come in. But their contracts require you to. To do all these things for them.

JE: Like what?

PM: I mean, most of the requests are sensible. They're concerned. You know, I'm concerned about audio. Their first concern is probably audio. That it be first rate. So they have lots of requirements about that, what kind of audio systems they'll be playing through. Lighting systems.

And then secondarily, the catering. If you show an artist a good dressing room and good food while they're here, it makes your day go that much easier. It's some of the things that the general public probably doesn't think about. They want to be taken care of. They're out on the road. They're on a bus. They're going to another town the next day. It's really not that glamorous of a lifestyle as you would think.

JE: Are they generally here at least two, three hours ahead of showtime or does that vary?

PM: Well, their crew will show up that morning to start setting up all their equipment. And then it depends. Sometimes the artists don't get here until 30 minutes prior to the show. Others will come in in the afternoon and spend the whole afternoon here. But to answer your question, it's a tough, the business of promoting talent or buying talent, as they call it now, is tough. And you don't always get exactly what you want. You sometimes hire an artist to come do something and then it doesn't sell enough tickets, you end up losing money on the show. So that's frustrating.

JE: Is there any act that you thought, for sure, this thing's going to be a sellout and it was a bomb?

PM: Oh, well, Sarah McLachlan. And about four years ago, she was one of my favorites in the 90s. And it didn't sell well. We ended up losing on that show. I mean, there's a good example. There's an example of a superstar, you would think, and a personal favorite. There's an example of that. It just didn't do well in the real world. And no one really knows why, other than she had her run in the 90s. And she's not the popular one now. But I still listen to her music. I have it on my iPhone and I admire her greatly as an artist.

JE: Here we are, November 14th, 2023. So. Yeah. So in the coming weeks, months, can you name some that will be performing here?

PM: Well, I can with the help of my little computer device. I'm going to have to cheat on you.

JE: That's fine.

PM: All right. All right.

JE: So from what it was to what it is now, these names.

PM: In Two Days, The National. Now, that's an example of a talent that is fairly recent. In this business. If you can't promote artists who are current. It's great having old stars. It's great having, you know, Nora Jones or Dolly Parton or the old the old artists. But whether you're in the recording business or whether you're in the concert promotion business, you have to keep current with whatever is young audience members are wanting to see.

A lot of it's hip hop now. And the theater, you know, doesn't do a lot of hip hop. But this group is called The National. They appeal to a younger audience. I'm looking forward to that. That's in two days, November 16th. Kansas, that would be a baby boomer act. And it hasn't done, you know, it's not going to sell out, let's just say. Where it would in 1975, this would have been at the arena. I don't know if it was sold out, but it would have done very well.

Got a hip hop show after that. We've got some Hispanic entertainment coming. A lot of comedians. And let's see. Leanne Morgan is going to do very well. There's a tribute show for Queen next year, which they've been here before. There's another tribute show that comes in that does Pink Floyd that's always very good. You think you're listening to Pink Floyd, they're that good.

Here's the plug. You just need to go to the Tulsa Theatre website. There's a sold out show next year called Bad Omens, which is a rock show. It's what makes it such a crazy business. Take Twenty One Pilots. They were here, I don't know, eight years ago now. DCF Concerts booked them, let's say in the spring, and the concert didn't perform until late that fall. And when we booked them, they were coming on, but they were not a sell out type show back in the spring. By the time they got here, they were huge. It had been sold out for months.

It was a big show. That's what you want. That's what you strive to do, and that's the frustrating thing when you're the talent buyer, is getting yourself in the situation where that happens. Where you get them on the way up, and by the time they play, they become more popular. This probably happened more back then.

It's more like in my generation growing up than it does anymore. One of the reasons for that is that it's so accessible now. Bands can get their music, like I was saying earlier, out on YouTube or one of the internet outlets. There's a ton of talent out there. Not to say that the talent's not good, it's just that it gets diluted when there are so many musicians trying to get their place out there.

What ends up happening is that the nightclub level of presenting live talent has grown much bigger than it used to be. Where you have smaller venues that can help these up and coming artists have a place to play, but it doesn't necessarily mean that five years from now that they're going to be stars. It just means they're running around right now and having a good time.

Chapter 13 – 6:15

How To Be Remembered

John Erling (JE): Speaking of running around... You are a runner.

Peter Mayo (PM): I am a runner.

JE: And you have some of the fastest times in age groups. How many years have you been running?

PM: Since I was 28. I did the third Tulsa run, I believe. And I've done every one since.

JE: Tulsa run? Marathons?

PM: I've done marathons. I've done well in marathons.

JE: Half marathons? I've done Boston. I've done Boston and one here in Oklahoma. I haven't done that many marathons because it is kind of hard on your body, pounding yourself for 26 miles.

JE: Can I just interject that I did the New York Marathon?

PM: You told me that. I would love to do the New York Marathon.

JE: I've been running for many years. I can't help myself. There's a running chip up there in our brain, isn't there?

PM: There is.

JE: But you're a biker, too.

PM: Road cycling. And I just wanted to add that... Tulsa is a great training ground for road cyclists. I go out and visit in Arizona now, a couple of months during the year, in the Phoenix area. And it was very obvious, even though they have bike lanes adjacent to their roadways out there. There's a ton of traffic.

The advantage you have here in Tulsa is you can get out onto farm roads or oil field, old oil field roads, within 10 minutes of leaving downtown. You don't have that option in Phoenix. They don't really have farms, per se. There's no quaint little roads out in the countryside. There's highways going in and out of Phoenix that have a lot of traffic and semis and this and that. But as far as finding a training ground, my point being... And I've heard this from other athletes.

It doesn't matter really which discipline of athletics you're talking about. Our climate and our... Our roads here are very conducive to training. Whether it be the football teams in Stillwater or Norman or the road cycling teams in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

We are blessed with at least 9, 10 months out of the year with good training conditions. And lovely roads. Now, the surfaces could be better. When the oil money was running through the state, I'm sure the surfaces of these roads were better. I go to Iowa every summer in July and do a bicycling event there. And there's a huge agricultural economy in Iowa. So they keep their country roads in really good shape. And that's part of the attraction of going up there. When you're a road cyclist, you want smooth, smooth roads. You know, no potholes, please.

Mike Boyd: So talk about riding out to West.

PM: Mike Boyd just asked. He said, tell us a little bit about the French Alps and Alpe d'Huez and that area. And I would recommend, obviously it's an expensive trip. But to any road cyclist that you go over and try this area of the French Alps. Because as far as keeping the surfaces of the road up and all this kind of thing, no one does a better job.

And that one mountain climb, Alpe d'Huez, it does live up to its advanced advertising as probably being one of the premier road cycling trips you could ever take. There are others over there. And so I haven't been in 20 years. That's a long time. But I intend to go again, even though with my mature age and everything,

Hopefully I could still get it done, get up that mountain. But it does rank. It does rank as probably the most memorable cycling experience that I've had. It's taking your bike, or you can rent it now, but take your bike over to the French Alps and try to go across some of the famous Tour de France mountain climbs that we've all heard about.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

PM: I guess as the person who preserved this piece of history, Tulsa Theatre, for the citizens of Tulsa, just as it was originally intended to be for the citizens of Tulsa, who found the passion, you can say it was because of acoustics, or because of trying to help the local community have good artists to come in and enjoy.

But yes, the legacy of Tulsa Theatre, and I hope whoever ends up with it, can make it even better than I made it. I think it could be used to a higher level than what it currently is.

JE: And we're fortunate that you became so interested in the preservation and the history of it. Not everybody gets into that, but you did, and we're fortunate.

PM: I do feel fortunate.

JE: You're that kind of person that ultimately bought it. So, is there anything else we haven't covered that you would like to say?

PM: John, you're very good at this, and you've covered it well.

JE: Thank you.

PM: If I can think of anything, I'll let you know.

JE: So then, take us out of here with a little... Tinkling of the ivories. Let's go upbeat. (Piano music) Alright. The piano stylings of Peter Mayo. Thank you, Peter. That was fun. This was fun time.

PM: Thank you, John.

JE: Yep.

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