

BY GREG TRIGGS

Stonewall Narrowsburg Jukebox

Very often a good night of theater is relived with friends via a familiar admonishment: "You had to be there." A good example of a cliché that is true. One of the wonderful things about live performance is that it's live. You get one shot and then it's over. You've got to be in the room where it happens.

Think of the many wonderful performances and events seen by the walls of our little Tusten Theatre in its many iterations. Built in 1926 by the Narrowsburg firemen, it was originally a community hall.

In the Depression, was Narrowsburg depressed? Nowhere near, thanks to the dances and banquets that regularly took place. A place to gather when townsfolk could tear themselves away from the radio.

In the 1930s, Harvey English, a theatre chain owner from Hancock, NY, converted the dance hall into a sloped-floor movie palace—although that might be a hyperbolic description. After the conversion, English

leased the space from the firemen and ran a commercial movie operation, the Park Theater, which closed in 1985.

The firemen then sold the building to the Town of Tusten, which is when it became our beloved-by-most Town Hall.

In the fall of 1987, the Town of Tusten and the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance (DVAA) negotiated a lease, giving management of the theatre portion of the building to the DVAA. Thus was born the Tusten Theatre. A cooperative effort by the town, the DVAA and Sullivan County resulted in a Community Development Block Grant to renovate the space for handicapped accessibility.

The Tusten Theatre reopened on March 24, 1990.

In the ensuing 34 years, there have been many wonderful moments, performances and shows in the theatre. Or, as I spell it, "theater." No winning that long-standing phonetic fight. "Theatre" with an "re" is right there on the marquee. Theatre it is.

With apologies to all the friends I've seen on the Tusten stage, the best show I've had the good fortune to see is David Driver's "The Stonewall Jukebox: A Documentary Concert," which took place on August 10. Beautifully staged for our intimate theater, this piece tells the story of the Stonewall riots through the loving performances of the music that was on the jukebox the night the fateful event began.

As I was watching the wonderful performers of different shapes, sizes, ages, identities and talents, I couldn't help but think back to 1926, when the community-minded firefighters literally built one of their legacies with no idea what it might become a hundred years later.

If you're looking for an unexpected treasure in a small town of 379 (data from the 2020 census) where anything can happen, "Over the Rainbow" style, I know a place.

Thank you, Tusten Theatre.