

V101 - Cine Capri_mixdown.mp3

Amanda Luberto [00:00:05] Something you might not know about me is I like movies a lot. Like. And then I watched over 200 movies last year kind of way. I've been cataloging my movie viewing for years now, and I take going to the theater very seriously. Generally, I prefer to go alone, though I've eased up on that in the past year. I always have popcorn and a doctor Pepper. It's like a Pavlovian response to buying a ticket. I immediately crave that salty, sweet, crunchy, bubbly combination. I try to sit as close to the middle of the theater as possible, and I prefer a late night screening. Some people have the comfort of church or the quietness of meditation. I have rumbling surround sound and the sticky floors of a movie theater. So when Dennis Villeneuve's much anticipated science fiction sequel, Dune two came out earlier this year, it had me researching what is the best movie theater in Phoenix. Where can I see this movie? The largest, the loudest, the most intimate, the most involved? Now the best movie theater is, of course, subjective. If a dining experience is what will draw you to the cinema. Your criteria for best is going to be different than someone who might be looking for the most cost effective way to see the film. But it did give me reading about all the types of cinemas in the valley. Phoenix is home to four regulated Imax screens coined the world's most immersive moviegoing experience. There are at least eight dine in theaters in Metro Phoenix and a few indie theaters. Sadly, the beloved downtown venue Film Bar did not make it through the pandemic. In the mid 20th century, though, Phoenix had three single screen cinema houses The Palms, The Paramount and The Cine Capri. But that is no longer the case. Welcome to Valley 101, a podcast by The Arizona Republic and Easy central.com about Metro, Phoenix and beyond. I'm producer Amanda Liberto, and today I'm going to share the history of one of Arizona's most beautiful theaters, the Cine Capri.

Amanda Luberto [00:02:22] When the Cine Capri opened in the mid 1960s, going to the movies was a glamorous event. A motion picture palace was a Mecca of art. Something to be respected. It was for families, but it was also for lavish decor and a deserved night out for the multiplex. One movie a night would be on display.

Gayle Martin [00:02:59] It went back to the movie palace days, where you had big auditoriums, big screens and movies had intermissions. There was a little portico on the east side of the building that was small. It wasn't the fancy, but it was very small. It was a smoking area for people to go out and have a cigaret during intermission.

Amanda Luberto [00:03:18] This is Gayle Martin. She runs a historical website about the Cine Freed. Works from Ingmar Bergman, Sidney Lumet and Billy Wilder graced the screens. The era of the Hays Code, a censorship guideline that ruled Hollywood, is coming to an end. Julie Andrews, Sidney Poitier and Gregory Peck were garnished with awards. It was the golden age of Hollywood. I'm here in Phoenix. George M Aurelius wanted to expand his theater business as one screen theaters were going out of style.

Gayle Martin [00:03:56] The way films were being distributed was changing. This is when the multiplexes were starting to become a thing. So the Cine Pre was kind of the last of that era.

Amanda Luberto [00:04:06] Gaels connection to the Cine Capri is deeply personal.

Gayle Martin [00:04:10] My father was W.E. Bill Holmes Jr. He was the president and CEO of Holmes and Son Construction Company. Holmes and Son was the general

contractor that built the original Cine Theater on 24th Street, just south of Camelback Road.

Amanda Luberto [00:04:28] George Aurelius was the vice president and general manager of the Arizona Paramount Corporation. Their company owned three theaters already. Palm's theater, which was across the street from Durant and closed in 1981. The Paramount, which you all know today as the Orpheum and the Miracle Mile Drive-In down in Tucson. But they were ready to design a state of the art facility that would blend in well in Uptown Phoenix and also adapt the changing film distribution style that was happening at the time. In addition to himself and Gayle's father, W.E. Bill Holmes junior, George had famous mid-century modern architect Ralph Haver Commission for the job to satisfy antitrust laws of the time, the constructors had to get approval from the Federal District Court of New York before breaking ground. The final product was stunning. The 16,500 square foot building had ten white sculpted concrete columns extending outside the theater, with copper overhang atop them. The copper was designed specifically so that it would achieve the antique green patina over time. There were hexagonal jade, Italian tiles, and custom stained glass windows, palm trees, Russian olive and Italian cypress trees, reflective of the desert landscape, surrounded the building from the second floor lobby. You could see Camelback Mountain. The inside was just as breathtaking. The auditorium had 4000 yards of antique gold fabric covering the arch of the theater screen going from floor to ceiling. The curved screen was behind giant gold cascade drapes that opened at the beginning of each film. According to Gayle's Cine Capri website, the action of the draperies elicited spontaneous applause from audiences. This was the first theater to have continental seating in Phoenix. This is where the floor slopes down, and the rows of seats goes from one side to the other. Getting rid of the center aisle that was common at the time. Inside there were 800 high back chairs. And for film nerds like me, here are some impressive statistics. This was also the first theater in the southwest that could project an all film aspect ratios at the time, and aspect ratio is the proportionality between the film's height and width. Classic televisions are typically a 4 to 3 ratio. Wide screens are a 16 to 9 ratio. Imax is generally 190 to 1. Being able to project different aspect ratios allowed the pre to project Cinemascope, VistaVision and Cinerama from its film projectors and offer stereophonic sound. One of the highlights of the theater was Star Wars. In 1977. Cinema replayed the film for over a year, the longest run in America. Point being, nothing has ever been like the cinema pre before. So why did it close?

Gayle Martin [00:08:05] Had nothing to do with its popularity. It closed because the people that owned the land there at 24th and Camelback decided it was in the way of progress. They wanted to put in an office complex.

Amanda Luberto [00:08:18] But it didn't take long for the Save the Cine Capri push to come together.

Gayle Martin [00:08:23] There was a gentleman by the name of Greg Stengel, who was just an ordinary Joe Six-Pack kind of guy, and he got that petition drive going to save the Cine Capri. And I forget how many thousands of signatures that they had, but it was huge. But the people that owned the property were in Texas, and they just didn't have the sense of community and the sense of history that the people in Phoenix had.

Amanda Luberto [00:08:47] Over 200,000 people signed the Save the Cine Capri petition and from there a Save the Cine Capri Committee was formed. National eyes were brought to the efforts by the magazine preservation which was published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Architect Harold Williams and Arizona broadcast personality Pat

McMahon were members of the committee. Unfortunately, in February 1998, the property owners won over the efforts to save it and the building was leveled to the ground. The last movie it showed was Titanic. The theater had been under a few different owners over the years, Harkins being the last.

Gayle Martin [00:09:37] After hearing a rumor that allegedly, the people redeveloping the theater were not going to allow Harkins to use the name Senate Capri for any new theater. That just kind of got me going. And I just kind of thought, hold my beer.

Amanda Luberto [00:09:53] When the building was demolished. Gayle had just moved back to Phoenix to help her ailing father.

Gayle Martin [00:09:59] Harold had sent a copy of the original blueprints, and she who has the blueprints can do a lot. So we decided we would have a quarter inch scale model built, and it would be in honor of my father.

Amanda Luberto [00:10:12] The scale model that Gale had Harold Williams build is what started her on this journey of preserving the legacy of the Cine Capri.

Gayle Martin [00:10:20] And I found myself as sort of the Cine Capri historian. Georgia Williams, who was the CEO of Arizona Paramount Corporation, was still living. So I got ahold of him and told him about what I was doing, which he thought was pretty cool, too. And through him, I learned the backstory because I was only ten when the theater first opened. I spent a lot of time with Georgia Williams. I gathered a lot of historical information from him, and that's how I got started. I was going to donate the model to the Arizona Historical Society, and that was the beginning of it. It just turned into Gale becoming the keeper of the Cine Capri flame.

Amanda Luberto [00:11:05] In 2003, the city could breathe new life. The Scottsdale 101 location of Harkins has a lavish symmetry theater within it, and of course, some of the original relics are on display.

Gayle Martin [00:11:18] They came to me because they wanted they had saved the curtains and some other artifacts. They wanted to put in a Cine Capri museum. So I gathered up a few people at the Arizona Historical Society, and we kind of became the committee that put that little project together to the Harkins.

Amanda Luberto [00:11:36] Today, the Cine Capri is the largest regular screen in Arizona. Has the full drapes, auditorium style seating, and a rendition of the white columns outside. While it's there to pay homage to Phoenix and film history, the Scottsdale 101 Harkins location is also a part of cinema's future.

Jason Carney [00:12:01] I'm Jason Carney, and I'm the executive director of the Phoenix Film Festival.

Amanda Luberto [00:12:05] The Phoenix Film Festival just finished its 24th year and is the largest attended film festival in Arizona. But in 2000, it started with three friends and filmmakers who wanted to get more recognition in their hometown. Jason has been there from the very beginning.

Jason Carney [00:12:22] My buddy Greg from high school, he was roommates with one of the founders of the festival, and so he kind of called dibs on being the program director

because that's how they did things. He asked me if I wanted to come help out, like as a volunteer, like the first festival. And I showed up. I had no idea what a film festival was. I was just like, all right, we're going to hang out and do stuff. And then I just got hooked. And, you know, we just kind of jumped in running theater operations. And then I was like in charge of judging and introductions of films, all those pieces. And I picked up a few other responsibilities along the way. And then in 2005, I became the festival director and later that year, the executive director. And here we are 19 years later, and they haven't kicked me out yet.

Amanda Luberto [00:13:01] And over the last two and a half decades, the festival has adapted as Phoenix has gotten bigger and the exhibition has grown.

Jason Carney [00:13:08] It's just gone from like 3000 people in two and a half days to now, like 20,000 people over 11 days. And it's not only evolved like size and scope of the festival, but it's like programming has gotten a lot better and those kind of things. So we just keep refining, adding new twist to the programming every year to keep it evolving because we don't want to just be like the same festival every year.

Amanda Luberto [00:13:30] Hosting the festival at the Harkins Scottsdale 101 is a part of what makes it stand out compared to other showcases.

Jason Carney [00:13:38] Our festival is really unique in that it all takes place in one location, so other festivals are size, you know, you've got to go take a shuttle here, take a shuttle there for a theater, but you end up spending time on that. So you miss that interaction with festival goers, filmmakers without having that one place convenient.

Amanda Luberto [00:13:54] Each year, two movies at the festival are chosen to be screened at the Cine Capri auditorium.

Jason Carney [00:14:01] I grew up here, so like getting to do things. Even though it's not the original Cine Capri, it still has that like feel with the gold drapes and all the pomp and circumstance around it. So that's a really cool appeal for us.

Amanda Luberto [00:14:16] Like most cinephiles who have lived in Arizona a long time, both Gayle and Jason has special memories. Seeing something on the big screen at the original Cine Capri.

Gayle Martin [00:14:26] My birthday was in February and it never failed. The years we would plan any kind of outdoor activity for my birthday party, it always rained. You could just count on it. So sure enough, I think it was my maybe 11th birthday. We get rained out. My mother calls the Cine Capri and gets a hold of Wayne Kurlander, and he knew she was. And she's basically saying, I'm begging you, I've got a birthday party. I've got all these girls. The hayride we were going to do got right out. Help me. And Wayne says, no problem. Just have a dress. Nice. We'll have them come down, you know, we'll have the popcorn and everything ready. And they were showing The Jungle Book. It was the animated version of it. So, you know, my mother was so eternally grateful to wake Hollander.

Jason Carney [00:15:10] A Few Good Men was one that stood out because we, like, went there and our friend was working the box office, and he's like, it's sold out. And we're like, is it already a lot of sense? But, you know, and we would do things where we would go down there and like back to the future too. I remember just getting there, going to a

midnight screening, and it was always cool, like a good vibe. And so like as we and or entered our early 20s, you know, we had a friend there and like when a big movie was coming out, we'd like all set up to go to the 7:00 Friday night and they'd sneakily give us like reserved seats for us, and we'd just hang out outside, play cards and just wait.

Amanda Luberto [00:15:57] Even though it's not the original historic location, the Harkins Cine Capri is still one of the best places to see a movie in the valley. And listeners, I saw Dune two in both Imax and Cine Capri. While the screen at Imax was the most impressive Cine Capri delivers an experience like no other. Thank you for listening to this episode of Valley 101, a podcast by The Arizona Republic and azcentral.com. If you enjoyed this episode, share it with your friends. And if you haven't already, make sure you're subscribed. Don't forget to rate us five stars wherever you're listening. Curious about something? Let us know! Visit Valley 101 easy central.com to submit your questions to the podcast. Follow us on social media at A-Z podcasts. You can find me at Amanda Liberto. That's lub e r t o. This episode was edited and produced by me, Amanda Luberto. Additional support by Kaely Monahan. And episode oversight by Kara Edgerson. today's music comes from Universal Production. Music Valley 101 is an Arizona Republic and azcentral.com Production. Thank you again for listening. We'll see you next week.