

## GLORIOUS LONG CENTER MAKES AUSTIN A PERFORMANCE DESTINATION

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Austin finally grew itself into its self-declared status as live music capital of the world. Maybe it stepped up grudgingly, but it stepped up nonetheless by literally making room for music that ranges from classical to rock to country to R&B to Latin sounds.

The shiny new Joe R. and Teresa Long Center for the Performing Arts that opens in March will have room for music, dance and the visual arts, and can accommodate teaching young people about all of it.

When the center opens, it will symbolize a leap for the region as positive as it is huge.

The Long Center, carved from the old Palmer Auditorium, will give Austin what it's been missing in a premier arts and concert venue: a true community performing arts center that will house the Austin Lyric Opera, Austin Symphony Orchestra and Ballet Austin. The public will view those performances from the Michael & Susan Dell Hall, a 2,400-seat grand concert hall described as acoustically perfect.

The center also will provide performance space to some of the city's emerging theater, dance and film groups that will perform in the intimate Debra and Kevin Rollins Studio Theatre, which seats up to 240 patrons.

Such a center is not only good for the soul – a community without art is an incomplete one – but an economic benefit for the acts and the audiences that will be attracted to it. The Long Center will draw top-notch performers from across the globe. The center is expected to increase the city's annual sales tax take by \$250,000, add dozens of jobs and boost downtown retail spending by \$10 million annually.

The Austin metropolitan area has grown to about 1.5 million people, and there are plenty of clubs, restaurants and bars to showcase its live music. Along those lines, the historic Victory Grill has begun renovations as it tries to recapture its storied history as a blues, jazz and R&B night spot in Central East Austin.

For now, two primary venues of the University of Texas Performing Arts Center are closed for renovations and not expected to reopen until 2009.

Austin also adds the Mexican American Cultural Arts Center on Lady Bird Lake to its burgeoning arts community.

And even better is that Central Texas folks from all walks of life contributed dollars and dimes to make it happen. Let's keep that up.

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