



Moisture Festival History

The seeds for the festival were planted at the Oregon Country Fair, and the vaudeville/circus/music/burlesque scene in Seattle added the Moisture.

In 1996 Tom Noddy, the Bubble Guy, a regular vaudeville performer at the Oregon Country Fair, surprised Ron W. Bailey with an invitation to attend a comedy/variété festival in Berlin, created by Hacki Ginda, a notorious German clown. A great time for the creative performers in Berlin, the trip was thrilling because the festival inspired everyone involved. Every day and night there was unique and wonderful entertainment in two tents, one large theater "The Chameleon" and several smaller venues in mid-town Berlin. Tom, Ron and Hacki dreamed about someday bringing a festival like that to the people in Seattle.

Enter Maque DaVis of Cirque de Flambe, The Fremont Players and ex-President for Life of the Fremont Arts Council. Maque helped organize the Fremont Solstice Parade and created "Trolloween". Maque and Ron had often talked about bringing some acts from the Oregon Country Fair to Seattle, so in 2003 they joined ideas. Understanding the grand scope of producing a festival they brought in Tim Furst, aka Fyodor Karamazov of The Flying Karamazov Brothers, along with Sandy Palmer and Simon Neale of the Fremont Players to help organize the event. In 2004, with the help of Fremontstor Theatrical, Du Caniveaux and the contributions of many artists and sponsors, they created "The Moisture Festival" to bring comedy/variété to the center of the universe and the greater Seattle area.

Today the year round festival organizers who work diligently to keep the festival going strong, are Jennifer Wensrich, Tim Furst, Maque DaVis, Mike Bailey and Ron W. Bailey with help from Randy Minkler, Cathy Sutherland, Martha Enson, David Crellin, Katherine Bragdon.

The first festival was only five days long and held in a tent in Fremont, rented at a discount from His Reverend Chumleigh. Fortune was on the festival's side when many of the organizers favorite artists responded to the request to perform in the tent and help create and christen the first shows. It has continued to be the generosity and willingness of the comedy/variété/burlesque artists and musicians that keeps the festival alive. Also, it should be mentioned that there is much more to a festival than performing in it. There have always been many gracious, hard working volunteers who share in the fun of making it happen.

Another key element has been local small business and individual sponsorship. That very first year, an unassuming guy delivering the kegs from Hale's Brewery to the tent turned out to be Mike Hale. He would end up bringing his wife Kathleen to an evening show and later they would offer to help in any way they could. This led to the Hale's Brewery warehouse space being converted to Hale's Palladium. The Palladium has served as the heart of the festival ever since. Other sponsors have continued to come onboard because they like the sense of joy the festival brings to the community.

From an invitation by Cathy Sutherland to the Seattle burlesque community to perform in some late night shows at the festival in 2005 an extremely popular burlesque series was created. It became so popular that a new traveling theater was created for the Moisture Festival Libertease Burlesque shows in 2006. These shows traveled to ACT - A Contemporary Theatre in downtown Seattle. In 2009 with the support of The Central Heating Lab at ACT, Grand Varietè shows were added to the Moisture Festival line up offered at ACT. We consider ourselves fortunate to have collaborated with ACT, under the deep and fun loving artistic direction of Kurt Beattie and his staff.

In 2008, the 5th anniversary was a wonderful celebration and Moisture Festival continued to evolve, achieving the goal of becoming an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

In 2009 another new collaboration was born with The Seattle International Film Festival. Together we created a film program that ran during Moisture Festival and highlighted films in the comedy/variètè/burlesque genre, with a festival artist performing live before each film.

In 2010 two new venues presented variètè shows. On Vashon Island, Open Space for Arts and Community, a beautiful 400-seat warehouse space transformed into a flexible events venue and in Georgetown, one of Seattle's great arts-oriented neighborhoods, the festival presented shows at The Georgetown Ballroom, a truly gorgeous venue tucked away next to the railroad tracks with its own mini villa. In 2011 we added a late night Burlesque show to the Georgetown April Fools weekend.

In 2011, 55 shows were held in five venues: Hales Palladium for four weeks, ACT Theatre for two weeks, SIFF Cinema for one night, Georgetown Ballroom for four shows in one weekend and Open Space for Arts and Community for three shows in one weekend.

In 2012 the Libertease Burlesque shows debuted at Broadway Performance Hall along with two all ages variètè matinees. Bringing the festival to Capitol Hill had long been a goal of the organizers, and we continue on Capitol Hill into 2015.

In 2013, we celebrated the 10th year of bringing the magical art of comedy/variètè to the city. The then-mayor of Seattle, Mike McGinn, issued a proclamation declaring March 21, 2013 to be Moisture Festival Comedy/Variètè Day! In 10 years, we had grown from the five days in one tent to 52 shows in four venues over four weeks, including an outreach event at the American Lake VA Hospital.

2014 saw two new collaborations that expanded our scope. We partnered with the acclaimed Teatro ZinZanni to present the MishMash Circus Bash. Additionally we partnered with SANCA (School of Acrobatics and New Circus Arts) to help celebrate their 10 years by hosting IMPulse Circus Collective for a three show run at Broadway Performance Hall.

In 2015, we are thrilled to continue these collaborations, adding a second night to the Teatro ZinZanni partnership and hosting the debut shows of IMPulse Circus Collective's newest work. This year saw a wealth of talent, and included an educational program featuring two workshops, plus an informative lecture on the world's oldest surviving music hall, the Britannia Panopticon in Glasgow.

Moisture Festival has always believed in the good will the artists at the festival bring to the community, a treasure shared by the artists and the audiences alike. Those of us at the heart of this theatrical adventure very much appreciate the way in which the Seattle community has embraced Comedy/Variètè/Burlesque at Moisture Festival, a month long, one of a kind celebration of spring and the variety arts in the great Northwest.