



Why So Many Asolos?

I'VE LIVED IN SARASOTA FOR 12 YEARS and consider myself relatively well-versed on local culture. But if somebody were to tell me to meet them at the "Asolo" theater, I wouldn't know where to go.

There is a reason for my confusion.

There are three theaters within a few yards of each other on the grounds of the Ringling Museum. The "big building" that faces south with the parking lot in front of it is called the FSU Center for the Performing Arts. The primary theater inside is an elegant three-level 500-seat auditorium called the Mertz Theater. (It was originally build as an opera house in Dunfermine, Scotland!) Here's where it starts getting confusing. The professional Asolo Rep acting company performs in there.

Also in that building is the Cook Theater. They call it a "contemporary black box theater" with 161 seats. It's the primary performing space for the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training. That's a three-year Masters of Fine Arts program. (The Asolo Rep occasionally performs in the Cook.)

Still with me?

Across the interior road to the west of the big building is—what could be the largest information/ticket counter in America. The Ringling Museum Visitors Pavilion houses—ready?—the "Historic Asolo Theater." Are you Asolo'd out yet? I hope not. It's America's only 18th century European theater. The professional Asolo Rep acting company generally produces one play a season there. Here's how their website explains Sarasota's most interesting theater:

"U-shaped, with three tiers of boxes, this architectural gem provides a rare sense of intimacy between audience and performer that adds so much to the theater going experience. Created in Asolo, Italy in 1798, brought to Sarasota in the early 1950s and painstakingly restored in 2006, the Historic Asolo Theater is one of the most beloved objects in The Ringling collection."

This theater has an amazing past. It's lived in more countries than I have.

Did I tell you none of this is actually within Sarasota? It's just across the county line in Manatee County. We'll save that confusion for next time. — Ray Collins



Gold Theatre



Mertz Theatre