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## The Doors Close on an Unorthodox Arts Center



Phil Marino for The New York Times

**OFFSTAGE** Kathie Bodily and Michael Rothbard at IMAC.

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IN the end, the [Inter-Media Arts Center](#) was as eccentric as ever, Michael Rothbard, one of its proprietors, said. But it was no longer so unusual.

The center, a suburban music hall that served up Art Blakey and [Ani DiFranco](#), Keb' Mo' and Phoebe Snow to an audience that once had few opportunities for such entertainment, closed its doors last month after 26 years in downtown Huntington.

It was done in by rising costs, flagging public financing and growing competition from newer performance sites — like the [Boulton Center](#) in Bay Shore — that surfaced across Long Island in recent years, said Mr. Rothbard, 62, who founded and ran it with his partner, Kathie Bodily, 61.

“We weren’t asking to be saved,” Mr. Rothbard said. “We’re very much reading the writing on the wall.”

When the 600-seat nonprofit center, known as IMAC, opened in Huntington in 1983, there was nothing else like it. Carved from the shabby remnants of an Art Deco vaudeville house on New York Avenue, it was a quirky, intimate space. The stage was built high above the old floor; the audience sat in what used to be the balcony. Nearly every surface was painted black.

The center originated with a state arts grant in 1974 as a video production studio in Huntington Bay. Mr. Rothbard and Ms. Bodily soon moved it to Bayville, in Nassau County, and added live performances. When the couple relocated it to Huntington in 1983, the focus shifted for good. IMAC kicked things off with five sold-out performances of avant-garde dance, including the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane troupe.

“It was kind of nervy,” Mr. Rothbard said. “Everybody there was waiting for us to drown.”

Instead, the center was soon booking [Philip Glass](#), [Herbie Hancock](#), [Suzanne Vega](#) and Richie Havens.

“I was in love with the place the minute I stepped through the doors,” said Emily Russell, 56, who first attended a performance at IMAC nine years ago. She got a job as a backstage manager there after she retired from teaching in 2007. “It was like a musical Eden.”

The center became a hub of Huntington’s arts scene, which includes an art-house movie theater, an art museum and a summer performance festival. It was “a huge economic boon,” said Diana J. Cherryholmes, executive director of the [Huntington Arts Council](#).

Mr. Rothbard said the operation cost \$1.4 million a year, including salaries for a part-time technical crew and five full-time employees, and about \$150,000 for rent and other building costs. About 10 percent of funds came from government grants, corporations and foundations; the rest was from tickets, memberships and concession sales.

Mr. Rothbard said the box office had still been healthy — the last show, on May 30, with the jazz vocalist Bobby Caldwell, sold out. But corporate and state support was falling,

and repairs and other problems wore the couple down, Ms. Bodily said. Last year, 50 pounds of plaster fell from the ceiling, narrowly missing Ms. Russell.

Ms. Cherryholmes said a new task force plans to consider creating a performance space to replace IMAC.

Mr. Rothbard, standing in the darkened theater last month as a crew hauled away a ramp, said, "I'll miss what was superb about this." He added, gleefully, "But I'm free!"